Mark on You

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by dylan69

Summary

Hannibal Lecter loomed over his prey, over the sleepy omega sprawled out in his bed. He was so vulnerable, aware of the world's cruelties only as stories. He expected the world to attack him, yet his inexperience had led him right into the wolf's den.

The alpha held his finger below Will's nose, checking to make sure that the drugs he'd placed in the omega's wine had truly knocked him out.

When he was satisfied that Will was in deep sleep, he ran a hand through the boy's curls, gently extracting it when he ran into several knots. Hannibal undid Will's shirt, endeared that the boy had put so much effort into presenting himself. How Hannibal had wanted to tear into him, seeing his lamb sitting on the table like a meal. It had taken all of his willpower, but Hannibal wasn't searching for a quick lay, nor for Will to come to him with ulterior motives. No, Hannibal Lecter was in it for the long game, and he'd just cast the first gambit.

Will Graham's life is upended when he presents as an omega at age twenty. While everything falls apart, he meets a mysterious alpha who seems too good to be true.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Prologue - December 8th, 1975

As a blizzard rages, snow blurring the line between sky and ground, eight freezing, empty men, deserters from a nearby war, who were shipped in from another climate and were quickly overwhelmed by the harsh Lithuanian winter, stumble forward through the forest. One soldier, a tall man with knobbly fingers and no family back home, glances at a clearing, blinks, and sees a single shadow-black figure break up the field of white.

The soldier shouts and points, his colleagues quickly take recognition and adjust their course, pushing through waves of snow and freezing wind. Hunger made the lines between them blur, they moved like a wave, like a single being with a single, starving stomach. As they approached, their cold-burnt noses caught a hint of a sweet, fresh smell, the scent of an omega.

The omega, wrapped in an ink colored coat, removed one hand from his right pocket and tossed a fishing knife, with a wickedly sharp blade and a worn handle into the snow, at the feet of the tall man. The men scrabbled for it, before realizing they couldn't eat it.

Unbeknownst to the dog-like men, the figure's other hand was firm in his pocket, his thumb gently sliding a disk. The pads of his fingers felt for the small grooves, tiny numbers carved into the brass surface. It ticked past 2004, 2005, 2006, the wheel turning slower as the disk reached its maximum.

Blue eyes swept over the unkempt deserters. They hunched over themselves, frothing with starvation. He lifted his arm, and pointed in the direction of Lecter Caster.

The men glanced at each other, squinting at the horizon until one noticed warm fire-light past the omega's finger.

They bound off without a word, racing through shin-high snow, at several points falling forward and pushing onward on all fours, ready for a bloody meal.

The omega pressed the disk down, and closed his eyes. When he opened them, it was a humid afternoon; July, 19th, 2017.

July 19th, 1997

Will Graham was seconds away from up-chucking all over the rows of fluorescent-lit vegetables. His head spun as he stepped back, dry heaving. With one hand covering his face, he stared at the offensive produce, thinking *It was a little late in life to develop an allergy to cilantro.*

He thought about how he was going to break the news to his dad that he couldn't eat their homemade coriander soup anymore, took a single step forward, and then crumpled to the ground as his entire body was shot through with burning agony.

As Will's flushed cheek pressed against the cool linoleum flooring, he felt a warm wetness in his pants, and realized, with dawning horror and disbelief, that something was *really* wrong.

"Hey, are you okay?" A voice cut through Will's spiral. He glanced up and saw a young woman staring down at him. She was silhouetted by the artificial lights that made her brown hair look like it was on fire. She thrust a hand forward wordlessly, waiting for Will's shaky hands to grasp hers.

"Seriously, are you good?"

Will blinked, "Y-yeah."

He didn't say anything else, instead trying to shake himself loose from her grip. When a new shooting pain almost sent him careening to the floor again, he relented and allowed her to grab his shoulders and offer more support.

Will could feel her raised eyebrows without looking at her. "I guess not," he mumbled.

"Is it," the girl paused, well-meaning awkwardness leaving a tightness in her shoulders, "your first heat?"

Will's head was filled with lead, the air felt heavy in his lungs. Everything felt achingly real as he nodded.

The young woman sighed, although it felt like she was commiserating with Will. She wasn't an omega, instead she smelled like something Will couldn't quite place. It was fresh and nondescript, not quite the scent of a beta.

"Do you need help getting home?" she asked, while shifting Will's weight, slotting her right arm around his back and under his armpits. She had a surprising amount of strength, as she seemed to carry Will with ease. *Or*, Will thought, *maybe his dad was right, and he needed some meat on his bones.*

He nodded, and the pair began to shuffle towards the door and down the street, groceries forgotten. Sweat beaded on Will's brow, muggy Louisiana heat made a million times worse as his guts turned into a furnace. Worse, Will couldn't stop the creeping feeling that he was

being watched; that every person on the street was staring at him, seconds away from attacking him. He felt as though any alpha he passed was smelling him. *Oh God,* he thought, I have a scent *now*. His head hung low, but his eyes jumped from faceless stranger to faceless stranger, blood pounding in his ears as his insides ripped themselves apart.

The girl sucked a breath in through her teeth, glancing behind Will. “You’ve, uh, got some blood….” she trailed off.

Will felt his warm face grow blistering.

“It’s okay!” the girl insisted. She whipped off the oversized flannel she was wearing and tied it around Will’s waist, hiding the back of his soiled pants.

“My name is Abigail,” the girl said, trying to fill the awkward silence.

“‘m Will,” he replied, breath coming out in short pants. Will lifted an arm and pointed in the direction of home, giving directions while he relied on Abigail to keep himself upright.

“I just moved here with my, uh-” she paused for a second as the pedestrian light switched and they began to cross the street, “-dad. His job needed him down here and-”

“Why do you have such a strained relationship with your father?” Will asked, somehow a full sentence slipped past numb lips. Seconds after, as Abigail looked away from him, Will began to scramble for apologies, realizing he’d let his intuition slip out, “Sorry, uh, I just-”

“No, it's fine,” she cut in, “He’s my adopted father. We’ve had a few disagreements in the past.”

Will hummed.

“Not that he’s a bad person or anything,” Abigail quickly corrected, as if she was worried Will thought poorly of a man he didn’t know, “He’s always there for me, although he adopted me pretty late, and, he’s been helping me pay for college even though I’m an adult and he doesn’t need to.”

Will nodded. “Where’re you goin’,” he asked, pain causing his words to slur.

“Louisiana State, I’ll be starting in a week or so. I got into their new honors college.”

Will hums in a way that he hopes is congratulatory, “Major?”

“Entomology,” she answered. “Which way are we going?”

“I like bugs,” Will mumbled, feeling a bit like an adult toddler as he struggled to keep up the conversation as he used his head to gesture towards the nearby docks.

“Are you in college?”

“Takin’ a gap year or two,” Will shrugged. He’d been about to start the same time as Abigail, although he was slowly being ground down by reality. “M’ place is here,” Will gestured at his

houseboat, slowly bobbing in the waves.

Abigail wordlessly leaned Will against a post and grabbed the boat's railing. Will tossed his legs over and pushed himself onto the deck. He stuck his arms out and wobbled for a second, having to catch his balance twofold. Abigail leaned over and reached her arms out, but Will's sea legs had always been better than his land ones, and he somehow remained upright.

"Thanks," he said, and he really meant it. Will looked up, making eye contact with Abigail for the first time.

She nodded, "Yeah, it wasn't any problem." Will could see she felt a little awkward, but what were you supposed to say when you find a stranger going through heat in the middle of a grocery store. Moreover, Will could see a lot in Abigail. She looked at him with a great intensity, as though any moment he may say something life-changing for a reason Will couldn't understand. It would have made Will a little uncomfortable, a little too likely to buckle under the pressure. But, underneath everything, she had an aching earnestness to her actions, a clumsy kindness that Will didn't often find from his peers. *Maybe she's just as much of a recluse as he was*, he thought.

"I'll, uh, see you around?" she said, voice pitching up into a question.

Will thought for a second, fully prepared to say no, to say something a little aggressive, a little cruel, to get rid of her before she could reject him when she got to know him. Yet, he found he couldn't, "Yeah, I think I'd like that."

She grinned, and Will felt, in spite of the agony in his insides, a nice, fuzzy warmth. Abigail waved, and so did Will as he turned away, into his home.

As Will entered the small, wood-paneled cabin, he knew his dad smelled him before he saw him.

"Willy, what are you doing coming home reeking of omega?" William "Billy-Graham if I like you, just Bill if I don't" Graham Senior called out, back turned as he fried up dinner. "I sent you out to pick up some bell peppers, not get some tail!"

Will cringed, trying to think of a way to tell his father. Before he could come up with anything, his father turned around, "Now, did you finally get the nerve to ask out that nice girl down the street? I've told you she's been eyen' you up."

Billy Graham laughed, sniffed the air, then froze. He scented the air again, turned around, dinner forgotten.

Will opened his mouth, and then closed it. The weight of the world and his father's gaze were on his shoulders, and it felt impossible to put the earth-shifting change into words. Will was an incredibly late to present omega, not a beta like his dad. In one day, his life was changed irrevocably. Will saw everything he'd been planning for, the entire future he'd created for himself, all going up in smoke. No college this deep in the south would accept an omega.

Even if he found a school that would take him, it would have to be out of state, meaning that his already expensive education would become untenable. Grief, heartbreak, and utter fear overwhelmed him.

“I-I,” Will stuttered, then burst into sobs, watching his childhood dreams fall away, “I can’t be a detective anymore!”

Billy-Graham rushed over and pulled Will into his arms, pressing his son to his chest. His large hand petting Will’s curls to comfort him. Will cried fat tears, snot pouring from his nose. He wiped his face on his dad’s shirt, gasping for breath between sobs. Will’s dad squeezed him tighter for a moment, “Hush,

“You’re a smart boy, Willy; omega, beta, or alpha, you’re smart. The world would be lucky to have you protectin’ it. You could still go to college-”

“Why should I,” Will cried, “Even if I got a degree, the FBI would never have an *omega* agent.”

“Maybe you could do something else, you could be an agent’s secretary-” Billy offered before Will began to sob louder. “Not a secretary, definitely not a secretary” his dad corrected quickly. “What about a private investigator?”

Will sniffled, then hiccupped. “I could do that,” he mumbled, feeling himself go limp.

“You could,” Billy-Graham continued, “You’d be good at it. There arn’t any laws against omega opening their own detective practice, and you’d be good at it. You could turn our boat into your first office, imagine that.”

As his dad continued to ramble, still petting down Will’s curls, Will mumbled, “A moving detective agency.”

“Exactly, you can go where the crime is, and I’ll be with you every step of the way. *Willy and Billy-Graham’s Mobile Detective Agency and Boat Repair Shop*, we’ll call it.

Will snorted and gently pushed himself from his dad’s grasp, “Solving crimes and saving motors, all across the East Coast.”

Billy-Graham grinned, wiping tears away from Will’s face, “See, it’ll all turn out sunny side up.”

Will pulled his dad into another hug, feeling all the emotions he’d felt easing off his shoulders, that is, until the shrill screech of the fire alarm and the burning sausage demanded their attention.

After dinner had been scrapped off the pan and the alarm silenced, Billy-Graham helped his son to his room. He set Will up with all the pillows in the house. After thinking about it, he grabbed the blanket from the living room. He didn’t know much about omegas, but he knew they were especially scent sensitive when they were in, well, he felt embarrassed to name it.

He sighed, then breathed in the sweet, minty scent. It made his muscles tighten, adrenaline leaked through his system, an instinctual desire to protect pinching at the back of his spine.

He already knew it was going to be a long day. Hell, it was likely to be a long week.

He went to his son's room and shoved a towel under the door crack, muting the scent. It just had to be enough to get them out of the city without any trouble. They already lived on the outskirts, far away from most people, specifically, far away from most alphas.

Billy-Graham thanked himself, once again, for choosing to buy their houseboat when he had the chance. He untied the boat and started up the engine. He navigated the boat away from the edges of Louisiana, deeper into uncivilized water.

He threw down an anchor, waiting for it to bury itself in the soft mud. The beta's eyes scanned the water, making sure no one else was around. He then headed downstairs, where the scent was so strong it almost made his eyes water. Apparently, the towel hadn't held out for as long as Billy-Graham had hoped. He pulled the cloth away with the toe of his shoe, and held back a cough from the strength of it.

Billy-Graham moved to the small kitchen and fired up the gas stove. The left burner had always been a little overzealous, roaring to life under his cast-iron pan.

He pulled open the fridge and sighed, he'd need to make some changes soon, starting with making something else for dinner. It was nearly bare, with only some basic produce, eggs, milk, butter, and beer. Billy-Graham wished that his boy would have at least had the good sense to go into heat *after* getting their groceries. He grabbed a bag of lettuce and saw how it had liquidized in its plastic container. He sniffed it, nearly gagged, and tossed it in the bin. So he had some eggs, milk, butter, and beer.

Billy-Graham grabbed two eggs and a stick of butter, determined to make the best meal he could with the paltry supplies he had. He tossed down more butter than necessary, cursing himself for not getting groceries sooner. He should have prepared for this. Billy-Graham had smelled something off for the past few days and he'd had his suspicions for years, yet, he was completely blindsided.

He cracked the first egg. It landed in the pan, sizzling, butter bubbling around its edge as it quickly turned white. As he went to crack the second, it shattered in his fist, causing eggshell shards to scatter into the pan and across the stove.

Billy-Graham clenched his egg-covered fist and closed his eyes, leaning over and pressing his forehead into the cabinet.

Will needed him. Will was going to need a lot from him, and a lot was going to change. Billy-Graham had raised a baby on his own, he could handle having an omega son.

He rinsed his hand off in the sink and grabbed a second egg. He tossed it into the pan, and cooked it flawlessly.

Billy-Graham slid the eggs onto a plate and carried them to his son's door. The scent of omega in heat was so powerful his eyes watered. It was acrid, like burning sugar. Billy-Graham wished he'd done more research into presenting when he first began to think Will might be an omega. It had been a possibility he'd considered without ever telling Will. When Will turned twenty, he'd been relieved, and assumed he'd been wrong, that his boy was just a beta who was a little on the short side.

He knocked on Will's door and left the plate of sizzling eggs in front.

"Son, if you, uh, need me I'll be in the living room," Billy-Graham offered. Will was silent behind the door. Billy-Graham worried for his son, he always did. Willy had been an odd boy, even when he was a baby. He'd taken a long time to start talking, and once he had, he seemed to have an uncanny ability to say the thing someone least wanted to hear. Willy was both overly insightful, able to see right through someone, and completely oblivious, unable to tell that it was wrong to announce that a man was cheating on his wife in the middle of Wal-mart. Yet, Billy-Graham loved his son more than anything in his world, and so he worried. He'd been protective of Willy when he was a sensitive boy with big dreams, when he was a moody teen, when he was a promising young man going off to school, and he wouldn't stop just because his son was an omega. He needed to put on a strong face, he wouldn't let his boy know just how out of his depth he was.

Billy-Graham crept to the central room in their house-boat, keeping an ear open incase Will called for him. He plopped down on his couch-bed and massaged his temples. He'd been sleeping on the suede sofa since Will turned fourteen, as teenagers needed their own space to grow. Will's bright smile far outweighed the persistent crick in Bill's neck from the couch.

The beta jumped as he heard something from outside the boat, his hand gravitating toward his shotgun.

Billy-Graham massaged his temples, reminding himself that they were far into the swamp where there was no one around for miles. Willy was safe.

He sighed and glanced at the coffee table. It was covered in their mail. Bills, free magazines, ads, and a heaping pile of college acceptance letters. Bill's jaw clenched as he picked up an opened letter from Tulane. The beta grabbed the pile, flicking through them. All good schools that gave good money to his boy.

All schools that took exclusively beta and alpha students.

He had no idea whether to throw them away before Will saw them again or leave them for him to do as he wished.

Willy could apply for an omega secondary school, he thought, trying to find something positive. Will would get into a respectable finishing school and then, Bill's mind trailed off, get mated to some alpha and live as a house omega.

Willy would hate that. He thought about what he'd told Will, about opening a detective agency. He had no idea if it was practical or not, in fact he was almost certain that it was more of a pipe-dream then when Willy was eight and decided he wanted to be just like

Sherlock Homes, trying to talk his dad into changing their last name and moving to England. But, possible or not, it was important to Billy-Graham that Will had some hope. His son could be a dreamer, Billy-Graham would take care of the rest.

Bill was startled awake when Will tossed himself down onto the armchair across from him. His son was bundled in a heavy, knit blanket, his brow furrowed with frustration.

He still smelled faintly of burnt sugar.

Bill thought of asking a million things, but couldn't find the words.

"How are you feeling?" he settled on.

Will shrugged.

"You hungry?"

Will shrugged.

Bill was out of his depth, "Want a beer? You're a man now."

Will snorted when Bill called him a man. He hunched over and thought for a moment, "Actually, yeah. I'd like one."

Bill pulled himself up, massaging his aching back, and grabbed a beer for the both of them. He cracked them open on the side of their table and passed Will one.

Will swirled it around and took a large sip before gagging on it.

Bill huffed out a laugh, "Try drinking a bit slower, son."

Will rolled his eyes, but listened, sipping his beer as Bill sat down. They stared at each other, glancing between father, son, and beer bottle.

"I just, I never expected this. I feel worthless," Will said, neck craned downward.

Billy-Graham tried to remember what he'd heard those bra-burners talking about, wishing more than ever he'd paid attention to all that gender equality stuff, "Omegas can do anything betas can do."

Willy rolled his eyes.

"I mean it, son, I do. Maybe you're not going to some fancy university in the Fall, but we'll find something for you. Nothin' about our day-to-day needs to change. You'll still come fix up boats with me in the shipyard." When Billy-Graham felt that his words fell flat, he continued, "There's no shame is being an omega, not even a late bloomin' one, only thing I'm worried about is if late presentations are a family thing. Do I need to worry about goin' into," Billy-Graham wrestled with the words, internalized societal ideals against his love for

his son. If he let shame keep him from even talking about what Willy was going through, he'd never be able to support him, "Goin' into heat myself at age sixty-two."

Will laughed wetly, then Billy-Graham pulled his son into his arms, bundling Will up, and tucking him under his chin. Bill rocked back and forth, murmuring into his hair until Will fell asleep.

July 20th - August 1st, 1997

Chapter Notes

Important

This is the second version of this fic. The first was written about 2 years ago. Since then, I have gone back and re-written/re-cut the prologue and the first chapter to fit better with the new direction. If you bookmarked this fic when it was first published, it would be a good idea to go read the first 2 chapters.

Will's heat was the second worst week of his life. It passed in a sweaty, horny, painful haze. Unlike regular heats, presenting heats weren't for reproduction but for 'rearranging the furniture' as an older omega neighbor had described to him when he'd asked as a young boy.

Will had never quite understood what it meant until his own body was 'rearranging the furniture'.

His insides turned into writhing snakes, twisting, knotting, and biting at his abdomen from the inside. Blood and ribbon-like chunks of tissue seemed to pour out of him, leaving him feeling hollow and cavernous. His father had left a pack of PresentPads, large, disposable cotton pads, about the size of a table placemat, intended for omegas to place in their nest and lay on top of. It was nice to not have to clean and change his boxers every thirty minutes, but it left Will feeling a little like a dog, laying in his own waste.

Three days into his heat, while trying to furiously wipe blood away, he ended up sticking a wad of toilet paper and a finger into a slit between his balls and asshole. Will made a sound like he'd been electrocuted, as his muscles all simultaneously locked up.

When Will felt as though he wasn't going to shrivel up and die of embarrassment, he subjected the slit to further inspection. Will thanked his past self for not believing his third grade teacher when she'd told him babies came from storks and stealing a book on sex-education. He'd been a pain in his dad's ass for weeks with all the new additions to his vocabulary.

After twisting himself into a ball, he grabbed his cock and balls, and pulled them to the side, to see the strip of flesh behind them. His vulva was flushed, looking almost inflamed as his heat and improved blood flow caused his sex organs to come to life. Before, his vulva had been flat, barely noticeable, as it was on all betas and alphas. Only when an omega went into heat, caused by months of almost undetectable hormonal build-up, did their sex organs begin to work. From there, the body went through an intense, week-long period of change, after which an omega will begin a normal estrus cycle with twice yearly heats and the slow development of secondary sex characteristics.

Will sighed and rolled out onto his back, staring at the ceiling. He groped at his right peck, then squeezed them together. Will sighed, wondering if or when he was going to grow breasts.

Almost as inescapable as the haunting visions of trying on bras at the mall, was an itch in the back of Will's throat. It was a discomfort that ran beneath his skin, as though he was wearing a full-body suit that was three sizes too tight. The feeling only ever seemed to fade when he was laid down and curled up in his blankets. It had taken Will almost four days of heat-agony to realize he'd been unconsciously nesting, and if he wanted to feel even a little better, he'd have to start *consciously* nesting.

Not for the first time, Will wished going into heat came with a guidebook, or in the very least, someone to ask questions. His dad had been doing his best, leaving regular meals and supplies outside Will's door, but he wouldn't cross the barrier.

Will picked up the laundry and blankets strewn about the floor of his room, ineffectually dropping it into a pile on the bed. He stared at it, wondering if it was supposed to magically transform into a nest. When it remained as inert as ever, he climbed onto the mattress and sat upon it. It felt like sitting on a pile of clothes, not some semi-mythical object of comfort.

Another cramp racked up his body, making the feeling of exposure overpowering. *It was all stupid, all of the omega bullshit*, he thought, knuckles white. Will was, at the same time, achingly lucid and aware of the hormones racing through his body, and completely subject to them and their effect on his mood. He grabbed the mound of fabric and ripped it off the bed, letting it fall with a quiet thump. Will stomped through the room, ripping jackets off hangers and pulling pants out of his drawers, launching everything into a singular mass. He'd been wrapping himself in his dad's blanket, but that got added to the pile. His dad's scent was comforting, but it didn't feel like enough. It brought pin-pick tears to Will's eyes, that the scent of his beta father, a smell that had always been associated with safety, with security, now no longer scratched the same itch. Will wondered if bursting into tears at the smallest provocation was a permanent omega thing. He hoped not.

Will paused as he rifled through his laundry bin. He smelled something good, something *really good*. With renewed vigor, he tore through the clothes, until he grabbed a large flannel shirt. Without thinking, Will planted his face deep into the fabric, inhaling greedy lungfulls.

When his sense returned, Will realized it wasn't his flannel, nor his dad's. It was the one Abigail had wrapped around his waist. It didn't smell like her neutral scent, instead it was salty, a little like old leather or a book. It soothed Will, gave his mind a moment of much needed blankness. Will felt somewhere in the back of his brain, when he managed to free his face from the cloth, that he should be embarrassed, but it felt so good the guilt was half hearted at best.

Will turned around, walked through his room, and laid down. He pressed the flannel over his face, head empty, as he wiggled, trying to get comfortable. His body still ached, random groups of muscles firing as his insides moved to make space for something new. Nonetheless, he felt soothed; he was still being stabbed, but at least it was blunted. His mind felt like mush, time becoming a dull haze that slipped away from him easily, especially after he'd wormed his way into the cozy lump of fabric.

After figuring out how to self-soothe, Will's heat-week went from unbearable to about fifty-percent bearable.

The worst week of Will's life was the one immediately after his heat. When his heat dried up, he'd tried to leave the house and found that it was a little like setting himself on fire. His instincts screamed *danger, danger, danger,* and he'd practically thrown himself back into the safety of his den.

After the brain fog had lifted, Will could no longer justify laying around all day in his underwear because he was in unbelievable, soul-breaking agony. The worst symptoms died down and the area between his legs dried up, but the emotional effects seemed to linger. The smallest thing would set him on edge, and he nearly ripped his dad's throat out when he'd dropped a pan.

Worst of all, Will found himself *bored*. Last week, his heat monopolized his time, but now, while he still felt as though his skin had been removed, he had nothing to do but lay around.

It took three days, twenty books, thirteen rerun episodes of M*A*S*H, and at least fifty twenty-minute power naps before Will relented and accepted that he'd need to fight his new instincts. He needed to get out of the house, to go do *anything* outside, or he'd go completely stir-crazy.

Will sucked a breath in between his teeth, clenched his fingers around the doorframe, and pushed himself through, into the exposed air of the boat's deck. The wood under Will's feet seemed to leech its absorbed warmth into his body. A light breeze danced through his hair, a much needed contrast to the stale air indoors. Cloud cover broke and sunlight rained down on Will. Clean heat, glowing warmth rested on him like a hug. He closed his eyes and looked up, light turning his closed eyelids red.

"Willy, you're up and about!"

Will's eyes flew open as he saw his dad trotted up to the boat, breakfast in hand. "I got us a bit of a treat," he said, lifting up the brown-paper bag, filled with Will's favorite donuts.

Will grinned and helped his dad onto the boat, where they pulled over two chairs and began to eat. Powdered sugar and blackberry jam covered Will's fingers as he chowed down.

"I want to go with you to the boatyard," Will said, around a mouthful of donut.

His dad raised his eyebrows, "I thought you'd, and I quote, 'Rather rip out your organs then look at another person."

"I may be prone to the occasional melodrama."

Will's dad snorted, "Absolutely you are." He took a bite of his own donut, "If you think you're ready, I could use some help with a motor."

Will took in his father as he slowly stood up. Gray hairs had peppered his dad's head for as long as Will could remember, but now, centimeter long white roots dominated his head. The

back of Will's throat felt tacky as he was once again reminded of what he'd lost, of what *they'd* lost because of his secondary gender. Will knew he was an accident, the result of a one-night stand between an old man and a woman from out of town. Instead of continuing over two decades of partying, he picked up extra odd jobs and gave Will the best childhood he could have. It weighed on Will, left him with a lingering guilt as he noticed how much older his dad was in comparison to those of his peers. Will had wanted to go to college for himself, but mostly for his father. He would get a good job, a well paying job, and could give back to his father everything he'd taken.

Wetness gathered in the corners of Will's eyes, a permanent curse since he'd presented.

"Is something wrong, boy?"

Will shook his head, "Nothin' dad. I love you."

Billy-Graham looked at his son and opened his arms for a hug, "I love you too, Willy."

The walk to the boatyard had Will's head swirling around like an owl's. Any time someone would so much as look at them, Will would jump. He'd always been overly aware of other's scents, but now, he felt like a bloodhound, able to sniff out another presence from a mile away. He felt nude as he walked with his dad, feeling strangers' lingering gazes in ways he didn't before presenting. Will clenched his fists, remembered how good the sun felt, and pushed on, father by his side.

"There's a lot of cops around," Will mentioned, "It's not even the end of the month."

Will's dad put an arm around his shoulder, forcing Will to speed up a little.

"They found a body last week, out in the water," his dad's tone was clipped, stress making his throat tight.

Will shuddered, unsettled as he imagined a bloated, balding body, halfway between person and object, floating in the murky waters.

He shook the idea out of his head as they reached the shipyard.

The boatyard looked the same as it did two weeks ago. *Hell*, Will thought, *it probably looked the same as it did forty-two years ago when it first opened.*. But now, it reeked of alpha sweat. Will had a passing familiarity with half the guys. He'd grown up on boat yards, up and down the Gulf Coast, and knew the types of people who worked on them. They knew him, or atleast of him, but they'd never bonded with Billy-Graham's odd, quiet son. The other half was guys who passed in and out of town, drifting by when they needed work, and picking up when they had some cash.

Will kept his eyes on the dusty ground, unwilling to provoke anyone into conversation. His head-down, block the world out strategy worked for almost the entirety of his shift.

Almost.

Half an hour before five, the boat yard's foreman, an ornery beta who only seemed to care about rules when he got to enforce them, came sniffing around. He stopped right in front of Will.

"Bill," he said to Will's father, who was several feet away, "please take your son home."

"Why?" Billy-Graham asked.

"We have a rich client coming in after closing hours, who's looking to get a lot of work done. We don't want to look," he glanced at Will for the first time, over the edge of his glasses, "unprofessional."

Anger rippled off of Will at the implication that his mere presence was *unprofessional*. Will could fix a boat better than half the people there, and he certainly knew more about engines than that button-down clad snob of a manager. A couple of alphas sniffed the air, picking up on how his new scent shifted with his mood.

Will's face went scarlet as the forman gestured towards them with his pen and clipboard, as if he was causing a distraction just by standing there.

"Come on boss, let's keep him around to liven up the place," another alpha strolled over and slapped Will's jean-clad ass, as several others snickered.

Two weeks worth of built up anger and resentment, the crushing fury of losing his entire life, blinded Will as he turned on the man and tore into him. Will was slight, and his body still residually tired from heat, but he rained down blows on the alpha, teeth grit.

Around Will, the boatyard burst into chaos. The forman yelled for them to stop, while Will's dad and two others tried to separate Will from the alpha. The second they were pried apart, Will turned on the other man holding him back, ready to attack, before his dad grabbed him around the waist and hauled him away. Will thrashed in his dad's grip, shouting incoherent sentence fragments about how everyone and everything in that boatyard was going straight to hell.

Will elbowed his dad in the solar plexus, knocking the wind from his lungs and startling the beta and causing him to drop Will. The collision with the ground was enough to shock Will back to his senses, ears burning as he realized he'd never get work in the boatyard again after throwing a tantrum like that.

"Are you quite alright?" a calm voice asked, shocking Will out of his head.

Will looked up, to see a man standing over him, head blocking the sun, holding out a hand to help him up. He had pale hair that seemed to glow with the light, shining on a face that looked as if it was carved from stone. Will was briefly struck by how often he'd been meeting new people this way, and hoped it wasn't a permanent omega fixture.

He grabbed the man's hand, and was pulled up much faster than he expected. The man had more strength then Will first assumed when looking at his pastel plaid suit.

Will stumbled over his words for a moment, “Thank you-“

Then, he was cut off by the forman.

“Mr. Lecter! I am so sorry for any inconvenience. I hadn’t known there was an omega on the yard, and you know how prone to outbursts they are,” his tone pitched up at the end of each sentence, trying to plaster over frustration with forced cheer.

Will wanted to rip his face off. “You said I was a distraction just standing there! You know I work twice as hard as anyone else there!”

The forman winced and kept talking, trying to pretend Will wasn’t there, “I am so sorry for the disturbance, sir-”

The other man’s hand still held Will’s, his grip unrelenting, “Why did you fire him?”

“Well,” the manager squirmed, “He’s an omega, we can’t have him distracting our other employees.”

“You’d fire a hardworking young man because you couldn’t keep your workers on task?”

The man holding Will’s hand had to be an alpha, his tall, broad stature and the way he carried himself made it obvious, but he lacked an apparent smell. While Will could smell any other alpha from twenty feet away, the omega could only catch a whiff of the older man after he’d been pulled to his feet. Even then, the smell was faint, but comforting, that made Will want to lean in and inhale.

The forman looked a little purple and began to sputter, “He’d hold up everything-”

“I could fix anything on any boat twice as fast and three times as well then any of them,” Will cut in, pointing at the boatyard.

“Better to have one set of hands that is truly dedicated, then fifty sets of layabouts,” the alpha man agreed, “Maybe it would be best to take my business elsewhere, as I find this treatment rather unsavory.”

“Now, I don’t think that’s necessary-”

“In fact,” the alpha cut off the manager again, turning to look Will in the eye, “Could you handle the task yourself? The boat is in incredibly poor shape.”

“I could make you an entire boat from scratch,” Will declared, fist clenched and chin raised high, “and I’ve got all my own tools.”

The man’s face didn’t move, still a placid mask, but Will saw a flicker in his eyes. On anyone else it would have been a face-spitting smile.

“I’m glad to hire you…” the man trailed off as he extended his hand.

“Will Graham,” he answered as he grabbed the other man’s hand and shook.

“Glad to hire you, Will Graham, as my independent contractor. I am Doctor Hannibal Lecter.”

“Pleasure to be in your service, Dr. Lecter”

“Likewise, Mr. Graham.”

August 2nd, 1997

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As soon as Will turned down the street, he knew which townhouse belonged to Doctor Hannibal Lecter.

It was of average size, the bones were the exact same as the others down the row, but the flesh seemed to shine. The dusty colored, pale orange brick and white shutters were standard, but this house seemed to glow. It was immaculate, even the mortar was bleached-bone white, not an inch of discoloration. Every blade of grass in his little front lawn was exactly one inch tall, standing like an army holding post. The only break in the perfect facade was an old, beat-to-hell boat on a trailer, sitting on the yard, crushing several thousand soldiers to death. Will heard his dad chuckle when he realized which house they were headed for.

Will pressed the doorbell, rhythmically clenching and unclenching his toes to ease his nerves. His dad stood behind him. He'd come under the guise of helping Will carry his tools, but Will knew that if he'd gotten this job two weeks ago, his dad wouldn't have even thought about tagging along.

The door opened, slowly, but Dr. Lecter wasn't behind it. Instead, Will blinked in surprise, "Abigail?"

"Will?" she parroted.

"Do you two know-" Will's dad asked before the door opened wider as Dr. Lecter walked into view.

"Hello, Mr. Graham and Mr. Graham Senior," he said, standing behind Abigail, "I see you have already met my daughter."

"Uh, yeah," Will replied, as Dr. Lecter stuck his hand out, past Will's dad and towards him. Will shook, and his dad cleared his throat. The doctor then turned to shake his hand as well.

"We're here to look over the boat today. We'll tally up all the damage, estimate martial costs and time, and give you a quote."

Will nodded along, watching Dr. Lecter. The man was placid, as though he existed behind a sheer veil that obscured his true face. His eyes, almost imperceptibly, kept darting to Will. Will didn't know what he wanted, so he nodded along with what his dad said.

Dr. Lecter stepped onto the porch, Abigail trailing behind him, and gestured to the boat, "Tally up everything that will need to be done. Money is no issue. Although," he paused, "I did only intend to hire one person to work on my boat."

His voice was clipped, as if he was trying to speak using a few words as necessary. Will wondered if this was because he'd hired them, or if he was always this polite kind of curt.

Will's dad narrowed his eyes, hackles raised, "I won't take payment."

Dr. Lecter inclined his head slightly.

After a moment of silence, Billy-Graham said, "Right, well, we'll get on it," and headed to the hunk of junk in the yard, Will dutifully tagging along.

Will glanced behind himself and saw Dr. Lecter and Abigail settling down on the porch. They sat in white wicker chairs that rocked slightly.

Will returned to the task at hand, the rotting pile of wood could barely be called a boat. It was, in theory, a well sized sailboat, with a little cabin and an area for two people to sit on the deck and operate the motor. If the motor was there, which it wasn't. Instead, there was a rust stain down the stern and several loose boards. They'd need to not only buy a new motor, but also a new engine mount. If they couldn't find one that fit into the boat's warped back, they'd need to outsource and get one fabricated. Will began to tally up prices, wondering if it was better to get a custom made mount, or rip out and replace the entire stern. If they replaced the stern, they might need to replace the sides, as all the work might wear out the rotten wood. If all that had to go they may need to replace the-

"First off, we'll need to replace the mast." Will's dad said.

Will craned his neck upwards, noticing the large crack that split the mast halfway down.

"Check the starboard, I'll get the other side. List the damage first, then we'll think about money."

Will paused for a moment, noticing that the right side was the one pointed away from the house. He considered saying something about his dad's new protectiveness, then decided it wasn't worth it, grabbed a piece of paper and pen, and began to scribble down notes.

Hours passed as the sun beat down on their backs. Sweat poured from Will's forehead and stuck there as humidity laid on him like a heavy quilt. If Will was struggling in the heat, his dad must have been doing worse. *If he was working at the boatyard today he'd be in the shade* a worming little voice in the back of Will's head said.

"Dad," Will called out, "you should go sit down, it's hot out."

His father shot him a look over the deck, "I'm just fine."

It rankled Will, more than a little, knowing that his dad wouldn't have to be here if he wasn't an omega. He was angry with his dad for suddenly treating him like he was a child who needed to be watched, and with himself for not being able to provide for both of them, for pushing his dad further away from retirement.

Will sighed, and his dad spoke up, voice gruff, "Don't huff at me, son."

Will looked away, returning his focus to the boat engine, deciding that pushing the issue would only result in an argument.

They worked in grumpy, sweaty silence, all the while feeling two pairs of watchful eyes trailing them. Will's dad stood up, wiping sweat from his brow, "Where's the loo?"

Abigail sprung up, "Only one of them is working right now, I'll show you."

She headed towards the door, gesturing for Billy-Graham to follow her. Dr. Lecter watched them depart, arms still clasped behind his back. The alpha wordlessly got up and came closer, head tilted to the side as he watched Will's hands.

A spark ran up Will's spine, his heart feeling heavy in his chest, as he felt the presence of the other man. Will, still kneeling to inspect a dent in the hull, paused, and looked up at him, feeling his ribs thrum. Will's mind kept imaging his hands, his large, soft hands, grabbing him. He didn't give the imagined hands intent, they didn't grab him for a reason, but just to touch, just for the physical sensation.

"I was thinking of making some lemonade. If I have any luck, I'll be able to keep those two occupied indoors for some time."

Will blinked, blood flooding his face as he realized he'd been sitting, staring at his *employer* in stupid silence. He nodded, "Thanks."

"I'd hate for my craftsman to be distracted. Besides, you appear to be doing perfectly fine on your own."

Will soaked up the praise like a sponge while Dr. Lecter turned to go inside.

Through the kitchen window, Will saw his dad emerge from the bathroom and immediately get caught between Dr. Lecter and Abigail. A tall glass of lemonade was shoved into one hand, and a sandwich into the other. The doctor caught Will's eye and winked. It made Will feel like he was in on something, like they'd colluded together.

Will shook his head, re-focusing on the task at hand. The boat looked like it had been sailed through all nine circles of hell twice and then left on land for a decade. Will swiped a hand along the side, feeling the smooth varnish of the wood until he ran into the largest hole.

The ground under his feet lurched, cold, salty seawater spraying the deck as the boat slammed into waves. He'd been blown into shallow waters by a storm he'd never expected; his peaceful fishing trip had turned into a nightmare. His heart jumped into his throat as he was thrown to the ground. The boat had crested another wave, the boat pitched backwards, bow flying into the air leaving him feeling weightless. Lightning stuck, briefly illuminating the water, just long enough for him to see the sharp rock seconds before the hull collided with it.

The boat shrieked as the waves tried and failed to pull it off the rock. He was thrown into the railing, knuckles turning white as he held on for his life. Wood and fiberglass cried as the wound was torn wider and the keel was turned to splinters. Waves collided with the port side,

pouring onto the deck and hitting the mast. Only the back of his mind considered how it would leave residual damage, both to the main shaft and the boon, all while the unnatural angle of the boat exposed the screws to unexpected stress. The front of his brain was concerned with not dying.

Hours passed, the storm worsening and then petering out, all while the wind and waves ripped into the boat like vultures to roadkill.

After the coastguard found them and brought them to shore, he had the boat put onto a trailer. Just stepping onto the deck made his legs weak and lungs heavy, still trying to cough up seawater months after. Instead, time got to crawl into the boat's cracks. Small knicks in the wood grew to half-inch deep gorges, chips in the fiberglass turning into spiderwebs of damage. Weather cycles caused the wood to expand and contract, the mast was pulled in two different directions as the weight of the boon tried to rip it in half. He could barely look at the boat without hearing her scream, so when he had the opportunity to sell her engine for parts, he took it.

Will pulled his hand back from the boat's open wound, blood turning the fibers of unvarnished wood red. He held his finger to his mouth, pulling the large splinter with his teeth and spitting it out. Will grabbed the pencil perched behind his ear and began scribbling down all the damage. All the while wondering how Dr. Lecter came to be so attached to this boat. The person who'd wrecked it, who'd be so careless as to take it into shallow, rocky waters with a storm on the horizon, couldn't be the same man who wore impeccable three piece suits in the Louisiana summer heat without so much as a pocket square out of place.

Will stepped back to look over the entire boat and startled as the back of his ankle hit something and knocked it over. He looked at a tall glass, with a lemon slice and leaves of mint, sitting in a puddle of lemonade. It sat next to a plate with a clean cut sandwich.

Then Will realized it was dark outside.

He blinked, wondering just how long he'd been out there, then grabbed the glass and plate to bring them inside. Will slipped in the door, following the sound of cooking and conversation into the kitchen.

The room was comfortably warm, as two pots boiled on the stove. Dr. Lecter appeared to be instructing Abigail and Will's dad on knifework. He spun the cutting board around, revealing a cherry tomato that he'd cut into a delicate rose. Will stood in the doorway for a moment, allowing Dr. Lecter to bask in praise for his skills while Will soaked up the scene.

Will cleared his throat, causing Abigail and his father to jump and Dr. Lecter to glance at him and then at the pots on the stove.

"Perfect timing, dinner is moments from completion. Please, everyone, sit at the table, we can discuss the boat then."

Abigail grabbed a few sets of silverware in her right hand and picked up four wine glasses in her left by weaving her fingers around their narrow stems. The corner of Dr. Lecter's mouth

twitched for a second when the glasses clinked against one another before his face smoothed over once more.

She sat them at a dinner table made to sit ten, all clustered around the head of the table. Will grabbed a chair, sitting down as Dr. Lecter pushed his chair in one handed, balancing several plates in the other. Heat prickled at the back of Will's ears as he caught how Dr. Lecter's muscles flexed under his suit. Will's head snapped down, staring at the silverware like it was the most interesting thing in the world.

A plate of steaming ravioli, with rich sauce was placed in front of him, along with another, smaller dish of salad, topped with several tomato roses.

"Impressive," Will remarked, stabbing one through with his fork, admiring it, and the popping it in his mouth, savoring the way the skin gave under his teeth, flooding his mouth with sweet acidity.

"Presentation *is* everything" Dr. Lecter paused as he uncorked a bottle of wine, "Good presentation honors not only those eating the meal, but the animals that died to create it."

The doctor began to pour wine into the glasses, before Will said, "No thanks."

"Maybe another time then," Dr. Lecter responded, picking up Will's glass and filling it with sparkling water instead.

Will nodded and stabbed a ravioli with his fork. He took a bite, then clutched at his mouth as the pasta was scalding hot.

His dad chuckled fondly, "Be careful, son." He took a bite and turned to the doctor., "It's delicious. What's in it?"

"It is ricotta, fresh basil from my garden, and lamb, all in a browned butter sauce. A simple dish that rewards the time and effort it requires."

Will stabbed another ravioli, "What, or rather, who died to make it?"

The skin under Dr. Lecter's eyes crinkled, "A young lamb, just past the cusp of adulthood. While others recommend a younger animal for softer meat, I find the toughness of age can be counteracted with enough care."

"It's incredibly tender," Will bit into a ravioli after blowing on it, fully able to enjoy how the chunks of meat seemed to melt in his mouth.

"Indeed, yet it is all the more flavorful for the life it lived."

Will nodded in agreement, savoring how the meat seemed to shine in the dish. The pasta and cheese were good, but they were there to exemplify the lamb. As he chewed, he remembered the purpose of his visit and pulled out his notes.

Almost instantly, the doctor spoke up, "Please, let us discuss business in the study with a digestif. For now, allow us to savor the fruits of our labor."

Will nodded, and the conversation shifted. They spent the meal discussing the town, Will and his father gladly cluing the Lecter family in on all the best local spots. Will remembered how confusing and mesmerizing the city had been when they'd first moved. He'd been fifteen and turned New Orleans and the nearby nature into his playground. While his peers hung out in the air-conditioned malls, he'd spent his days fishing and exploring. He remembered like an old wound, how lonely it had been, how he'd been an outside observer to the rest of the world.

As soon as their plates were clear, Will stood up from his seat and immediately began gathering dishes. Dr. Lecter stood up, continuing his conversation, inquiring about where to buy the freshest fish, while his eyes were locked onto Will's hands. Will's knuckles prickled, and made him more aware of his actions.

"Please, you are guests. Allow me," the doctor reached over and plucked the dirty dishes from Will's grip. His fingertips brushes the back of Will's hand, leaving a tingling warmth in its wake.

While her father took the dishes to the kitchen, Abigail herded them into the study. She crouched down, pushed back the fireplace screen, and turned on a gas flame. The room was cast with warm, heavy light that made Will want to sink into sleep.

"Do you have the list of damages?"

Will nodded, and passed the notebook to the doctor. Dr. Lecter glanced over the page, "When will you be able to start repairs?"

"I could start Monday. I'll need to purchase wood and other supplies."

The doctor nodded, pulled out his sleek, black, leather wallet, and pulled out a sleek, black card without any visible numbers and passed it to Will, "Put any purchases related to the boat onto this."

Will blinked, "What's the budget-"

"Whatever is the best," the doctor cut off. "Money is no object," his eyes sparkled. Will ran the pad of his thumb over the card's edge, wondering why. The doctor was wealthy, but not wasteful, yet he'd throw away thousands for a scrap boat.

"Also, allow me to pay you for today's service," the doctor said as he passed Will a hundred dollar bill.

"I can't-" Will was used to being paid half that at the boatyard, if he was lucky.

"I insist," the doctor said, with finality.

Will tucked the money into the pocket of his jeans as Dr. Lecter poured two glasses of whiskey, each with a sphere of ice inside. He passed one to Will's father, and settled into a chair across from them. The conversation shifted to a comfortable back and forth, rhythmic like the ocean that washed over Will.

They left the Lecter home with an open invitation to have dinner with the Lecters any time and armfulls leftovers, all tucked away into neat glass boxes with plastic lids. Will's dad stumbled as they walked, his shoulder bumping into Will's.

"Doctor's got some strong stuff," he remarked, slowing down to steady himself.

Will nodded, walking close enough to his dad to support him if he needed it.

"Willy," Billy-Graham said, "you can go fix that boat on your own."

"Really?"

Will's dad nodded, "Dr. Lecter is a good man."

Will grinned, "Thanks dad."

"I can't risk getting roped into making ravioli again. I don't know if my hands will *ever* stop aching."

Chapter End Notes

thanks for all the lovely comments, you guys are the best. for ch updates and sneakpeaks, follow me on twt

August 12th - 20th, 1997

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"What about this one?" Abigail asked, running her hand along the finished surface of a scots pine. Will's mouth screwed up like he'd swallowed a lemon.

"No, look at all those knots," he traced the lines of the wood with one finger, "It's indicative of an irregular grain, which makes for a weaker mast."

Abigail had accompanied him on all his supply trips, dutifully tagging along any time they needed new materials for the boat. At first, Will assumed she was there to keep an eye on Will, to make sure he wasn't wasting her dad's money. Instead, she seemed determined to get Will to spend *more* money. Not only did she insist that Doctor Lecter would want the highest quality materials for his repairs, she kept insisting they use the card to buy them lunch. Will had talked her down the first few days, insisting that he pay with cash. But, whenever they returned late in the evening, when the doctor was home, he'd ask what they did. When told that Will had paid for their lunch himself, he'd offer his own money, describing the meals as a 'work expense'.

Abigail's shoulders had a nervous tightness that Will had initially attributed to the aforementioned reporting-to-her-dad, but after seeing how the man was eager to spend it on the boat, he figured it had to be something else. It wasn't until Abigail mentioned that she'd be out of town for orientation that weekend did Will begin to put together the dots. Will wasn't stupid. He was a single omega and Doctor Lecter was an older alpha without a mate. The doctor was more polite than the alphas on the boatyard, but an alpha was an alpha. Will's stomach soured, a little disappointed that Abigail had only been hanging around to set him up with her dad. *But, unfortunately,* Will thought, *he couldn't even be properly mad about it, because if he had any sense, he'd take advantage of the offer.*

Will marched to the corner store and left with three magazines, one for omega fashions, one for adult content, and one for teens because Will felt like he was missing some things, a handful of make-up products, a razor, and a hairdryer, all paid for with the doctor's sleek, black credit card. It *was* all for the alpha, Will justified.

Once he was home, Will locked himself in the bathroom, sat on the closed toilet lid, and began to leaf through the magazines. He wasn't good at the whole 'omega' thing yet, but he was certainly good at research. Thin waifs stretched themselves across all glossy pages, the only difference between the omegas in the different magazines was how much they were wearing. Across the three, Will counted sixty-three omega models or celebrities, of those only two were male, both found in the porno he'd picked up. One was tucked away into the corner of a centerfold. The other took up a full page. He was twisted around, his ass sticking towards the camera, holding his cheeks opened while he peered over his shoulder to simper at the camera. *He was positioned to hide his dick,* Will noted, *and the camera was angled to make his hips look wider.*

He sighed, and shucked off his jeans, tossing them to the floor, and picking up the razor. It was pastel purple with pink details, labeled as an omega's razor for 'Soft, Smooth Skin'. Will didn't see how it was any different from a normal razor, but he assumed it was another omegan thing that went over his head.

The shaving cream was cold as he rubbed it between his hands and lathered up his legs. He pulled the razor through white foam, leaving clean lines. The water was cool as it washed away years of dark leg hair, bringing to sharp attention everywhere Will had nicked himself. The bottom of the tub turned the color of raspberry sherbert, ribbons of blood carrying needles of hair, then dissipating. Will ran his hand up the smooth leg, the feeling so alien the limb no longer felt like his own.

Will grabbed his nicest pair of jeans and a button-up shirt from the back of his closet, one his dad had gotten him for Christmas four years ago when he'd tried to get them to Church. They'd only gone twice, and Billy-Graham had only convinced Will to wear the shirt one of those times. It was tight in a way Will hoped was attractive. He rolled the sleeves up to his elbows before catching his reflection in the mirror and noting how large and man-ish it made his forearms look.

Will's final battle was against his face, against the heavy set of his brows and the square cut of his jaw. He flipped through the teen magazine until he found an article about contouring. He'd selected a compact with two shades of tan and a small brush. Will tried to follow along, only ending with something halfway passable after three tries.

Water gathered at the corners of his eyes as Will plucked three hairs from his brows at once. Will dropped the tweezers, realizing exactly what his highschool crush had meant when she said beauty is pain. Will found he had low tolerance for beauty, and an even lower one for pain. He licked his fingertips, and smoothed his brows down, at least temporarily taming the hairs.

Finally, Will twisted a tube of lipstick. It was bright red, a color that made the omegas in the magazines look seductive and sexy and made Will look, to his dawning horror, like a sideshow clown. He grabbed a washcloth and wiped it off, leaving a hint on the color and a stain on the rag.

After giving himself a final once-over, he accepted that he was at a stalemate, and headed out of the house. His dad was sleeping on the couch, TV illuminating the room. Will wrote a brief note mentioning he was having dinner at the Lecter's, and left it on the dining table.

He arrived on the doctor's doorstep as dusk was falling, the sun's warmth fading. He knocked twice, then readied himself for war.

Doctor Lecter opened the door, dressed far more casual than Will had ever seen him. Of course, the doctor's idea of 'dressing down' was a white button-up with slacks, but Will was still a little shocked the man was able to leave his room without three layers on.

Silence stretched on, as the doctor looked him up and down, refusing to make the first move.

“Abigail said you would be having dinner alone,” Will blurted out, suddenly self conscious, feeling as though the make-up burned his skin, “I thought I’d offer my company.”

As Will spoke, the doctor’s shoulders moved backwards, his body rearranging to perform, alpha pride rising to the surface as he was offered the opportunity to feed someone, “Dinner can easily be converted for two. We’ll be having a play on cretons de porc, as I have not seen my butcher recently and need to make use of leftover meat.”

Sat at the table, in a chair to the right of the table’s head, Will watched the doctor carry in a large, silver platter. Neat lines of crackers, cured meat, and fine-sliced olives twirled around each other, all surrounding a porcelain dish, filled with pork pâté.

The doctor placed two wine glasses onto the table, and uncorked a bottle of white wine, “Vignoles, a rich, well-boddies white wine that will lift and brighten the dish.”

“I can’t-”

“Please, dear Will, we are both adults here. In Europe, where I spent my teenage years, they don’t have such puritanical limits.”

Will stared at the empty glass, glancing at the chilled bottle of wine and the doctor’s warm hands. If he wanted this to work out, he needed to be ‘adult’. He nodded, and the glass was filled.

Will sipped it, eyes closed, expecting to be slapped in the face by the acrid taste of alcohol, yet, was met by a mild sweetness. He blinked, looking up at the doctor’s face, slight approval coloring his eyes. “Its good,” Will said.

The doctor poured his own glass and sat down. He selected a cracker and a slice of cheese, using a silver serving knife to spread the pâté, but did not eat it until Will repeated the actions, and they could share the first bite together.

It was luscious, the meat and cheese melting on the top of his mouth, while the cracker satisfyingly crunched. The spice of the pâté was mellowed by soft cheese.

“Tastes like scrapple,” Will said, reminded of a meal he and his dad had shared when their hunt for work took them up north.

“Indeed, it is a similar way to make use of scraps, of any cut unfit for a centerpiece dish. I find it poetic, the desire to not only make meat last longer, but to make it taste delicious at every stage.”

“It’s respectful to the pig who died,” Will filled in. The doctor looked as if he was purring. *Hook, line, and sinker*, Will thought.

Dinner conversation subsided into the rhythmic sounds of consumption. Will alternated between crossing his legs at the thighs and at the ankles, trying to remember which one was ‘ladylike’.

Will waited until they were finished to make his move. He stood from his chair, and sat on the edge of the table, right in front of the doctor. He cocked his head slightly to the side, curious about what the omega would do. Will screwed his eyes closed, and threw himself forward, planting his lips firmly on Doctor Lecter's.

The doctor's broad hands grabbed Will's shoulders and pushed him back. He ran his tongue over his top lip, as if tasting something. Will's chest clenched, feeling as though he'd been gored and emptied out. Will's face flushed with humiliation. He wanted nothing more than to melt into the floor, to avoid having to meet the doctor's eyes.

Dr. Lecter gently grabbed Will's chin from where it was pressed to his chest, slowly raising his head, "You are a beautiful young thing, but I fear that I would be taking advantage of you, dear Will."

"No, you-"

"Besides," he swiped his thumb along the corner of Will's mouth, "we barely know each other."

If Will ran in a straight line out the door, he'd hit the Mississippi river, which he could walk right into and never resurface.

Will pushed himself off the table to enact his plan, but when he put weight onto his legs, he felt the doctor grab his waist, thumbs pressing against his hip bones "I would like to continue this conversation where I can look you in the eye," The doctor said.

"You must think I'm a slut," Will murmured derisively, eyes still glued to the floor.

"Not at all, although I am curious why," the doctor responded, bringing Will into his study, where he sat the omega down in a cozy, leather armchair. He passed Will his wine glass and filled it up, "Was it my money?"

He considered lying, telling the doctor that he didn't care about the money, that he was madly in love and ready to throw himself at the older alpha like something out of a bodice ripper. When he tried to find the words, Will came short. The doctor's firm gaze forced honesty out of him, "Yeah, a little. You pay me great, but the job won't run forever, and once it's done I don't know what I'll do. I've burned any chance of working at the nearby boatyard, and I know that forman well enough to be certain he'll raise hell to make sure no one else hires me. I don't know what else to do, and my dad is getting old, and I just want to support him-" Will hadn't realized he was rambling until the doctor cut him off.

"That is very noble, but why me? You are a lovely young omega, you must have plenty of sutors vying for your hand."

Will shook his head, "I don't, but if I did I'd still pick you. You respect me. You're the only person who doesn't treat me differently now that I'm an omega. Even my dad acts like I'm a child in need of supervision half the time!" Alcohol caused his buried feelings to surface, adding unintended vitriol to the words. "But," Will paused, staring at the doctor's flat face, "you don't, you make me feel like I'm a *person*, not just an omega, and I don't know why."

“You remind me of my mate,” the doctor stared at the horizon, his face the same mask as before but his eyes shone with something unspoken. “Before him, I’d believed that being an alpha made me superior.”

“How’d he change your mind?” Will asked.

“He punched me in the face.”

Will snorted, then tried to hide it by taking a gulp of his wine. The doctor’s eyes held a vast fondness, one that Will felt he could drown in.

“He was exquisite, my Patroclus, he burned like an everlasting flame. I could not disrespect him because he would not allow it. Life has been empty since I lost him,” Will’s chest ached as he spoke, feeling the doctor’s grief as if it was his own. “Would you do me a favor, dear Will?”

“Anything.”

“Would you sit with me while I work for a moment? I have not had company in some time.”

Will nodded, and the doctor slightly inclined his head in appreciation. He stood, picked up a file and pen from a large, oak desk, and sat back down. The doctor’s free hand patted the cushion next to him. Will sat where instructed, spine ram-rod straight until curiosity got the better of him, and he peered at the doctor’s papers.

“What is that?” Will asked, breaking their peaceful silence.

“A police report about the recent killing of a young man. The case is more esoteric and violent than the local PD could handle.”

“Can I see?”

“These papers have not been released to the public. They include details only those working on the case know.” Will wilted a little at the rejection, before the doctor spoke again, “So, everything I show you needs to stay between us.” He winked, and Will's mouth split into a smile and winked back at his co-conspirator. He walked across the living room, legs still shaky, to sit next to the doctor on the sofa. As he settled in, Dr. Lecter picked up the wine bottle and topped off both of their glasses.

Will scanned over the documents in the alpha’s hands, staring at the photos paperclipped to the file. The victim had been found tied upside down to a tree, hanging from a branch.

His hands ached from phantom rope burn, as he strung his victim, no, his hog up. The long scratches on his arms and his raw palms prickled as he clenched his fist around his knife. He stroked the pig’s smooth face, before slitting its throat, watching blood pour down his square jaw and through his curls. He didn’t know this omega, he didn’t matter. What mattered was the *meat*

“It doesn’t matter,” Will said, then realized that the doctor was staring at him. He scrambled for an explanation, “The pig- the victim, it's not about him. He’s collateral in something

greater.”

The doctor continued to stare, as Will reassessed what he’d just blurted out without proof. The man probably thought he was crazy.

“How did you find that?”

“It’s a crime of passion, just not for him,” Will gestured at the body, “The killer switches between brutality and kindness. He resents the body because it's not who he really wants.”

“His golden ticket,” the doctor murmured.

“Exactly.”

Will grabbed the file, leafing through it between sips of wine, “He’s going to kill again, either another proxy or his golden ticket.”

“I agree, although the local police do not.”

Will snorted, “Of course they don’t.”

“You should accompany me to the station, your insight would be invaluable to the investigation.”

“Really?”

“Most certainly,” the doctor assured as Will covered his mouth to yawn, “I would like to hear your thoughts about why the killer used this method of tying.”

Will’s mind, untethered from plentiful alcohol, immediately began to spark, forming a quickly growing webs of connections. The two of them talked late into the night, discussing the gruesome killings.

Will yawned, jaw popping as he slumped into the sofa. “Forgive me for keeping you up so late,” the doctor said as Will waved his hand dismissively.

“It’s fine, but I should be headed home,” Will said as he drained his glass of wine.

The doctor clicked his tongue, “I cannot in good conscience let you walk home by yourself at this hour.”

“Because I’m an omega?”

The doctor reached out and brushed a curl behind Will’s ear, leaving him breathless, “Because you are a pretty, young thing and I, at my best, am a gentleman. You are also significantly more intoxicated than I believe you think.”

Will’s ears felt warm, “It takes almost forty-five minutes to walk home.”

The doctor mulled it over for a moment, “Why not sleep here for the night? Neither of us will need to make the trip.”

Will nodded, and the doctor politely offered an arm to support the drunken young man. He led them through the house, stopping periodically when Will wanted to comment on the ostentatious decor. When they came to the stairs, Will felt as though his head was made of cotton and he was operating his limbs like a separate vehicle.

Without saying anything, the doctor placed his other arm at Will’s knees, swept him up into a bridal carry, and headed up the stairs. “You should eat more,” the doctor said, running his fingers along Will’s ribs.

Will’s brain felt like it was malfunctioning.

Doctor Lecter brought him to a large room, which was filled by a king-sized bed, covered in a silken bedspread. He sat Will onto the mattress and turned around, searching through a dresser until he found a nightshirt for Will. The bed felt like it was made from clouds, it curved around Will’s body, cradling him, calling him to rest, and it smelled so good. He leaned into the stack of pillows, chasing the comforting scent and closing his eyes for a moment.

“Wha’s with the samurai…” Will asked, wine and sleepless pulling his words down. He took the shirt, but before he could start undressing, sleep overtook him.

Hannibal Lecter loomed over his prey, over the sleepy omega sprawled out in his bed. He was so vulnerable, aware of the world’s cruelties only as stories. He expected the world to attack him, yet his inexperience had led him right into the wolf’s den.

The alpha held his finger below Will’s nose, checking to make sure that the drugs he’d placed in the omega’s wine had truly knocked him out.

When he was satisfied that Will was in deep sleep, he ran a hand through the boy’s curls, gently extracting it when he ran into several knots. Hannibal undid Will’s shirt, endeared that the boy had put so much effort into presenting himself. How Hannibal had wanted to tear into him, seeing his lamb sitting on the table like a meal. It had taken all of his willpower, but Hannibal wasn’t searching for a quick lay, nor for Will to come to him with ulterior motives. No, Hannibal Lecter was in it for the long game, and he’d just cast the first gambit.

As he freed the omega’s arms from the shirt sleeves, he ran his hands along the smooth skin of Will’s torso, committing it to memory. His attention was drawn to Will’s neck. Hannibal inspected it, both with his eyes and his hands, practically purring as he found it completely unblemished. Temptation overwhelmed him, boiling hot in his gut, as he leaned down, jaw open wide, and placed it along the pale column of Will’s neck. His teeth wrapped halfway around, creating a bite that would be impossible to hide. Anyone who saw Will would know

who he belonged to. Yet, he fought back his screaming instincts and held his jaw open, teeth pressing into the soft skin but not breaking it.

He unbuttoned the omega's pants, hooking his thumbs into the waistband of jeans and boxers, and pulled them down in one motion, then pulled his hands all the way up Will's shapely, lightly haired legs. Hannibal found four nicks on the boy's skin, left by a cheap razor. In the future, Hannibal would shave the omega himself, with a proper lather and a sharpened straight-razor.

His cock was a lovely little mouthful, slightly larger than most omegas because of his late presentation. Hannibal held it gently in his fingers, feeling the slight weight. It was graceful, thin and slightly curved, with two delicate veins wrapping around its length. Hannibal looked forward to feeling it change, as omega hormones would make the skin softer, possibly even a little smaller.

Hannibal lifted up Will's cock and balls, pulling the skin taut, to explore the lovely slit below. It was just developing, still fresh from heat. Hannibal could imagine him wailing, speared through on his cock, as his small, still-forming hole was forced around his length. He savored the fantasy, and poured it into a bottle, the same one they had shared that night, and placed it onto a shelf in his mind. He pulled his nightshirt onto the omega, and tucked the boy into bed.

He pressed a kiss to Will's forehead, and headed out. If his boy was interested in accompanying him during the investigation, he would make sure there was something worth investigating.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for all the lovely comments, theyve been a joy to read

August 21st, 1997

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will dreamed of hands. Large, warm hands, soft in the palm with rough calluses on the fingers and thumbs, coming from nowhere. Tens of them, petting the length of his body like a blanket, covering his face, leaving his vision a kaleidoscope of red-pink-pale-black. Will pushed back, more to test the restraints then to free himself.

The moment he attempted to get up, the hands transitioned from touching to holding, snapping into place, pressure leaving indents in Will's flesh. The hummingbird thrum of Will's heart caused his entire chest to feel flush with warmth. He squirmed, the fingers left his skin tingling, as they traipsed across his exposed hip bones.

The creature was made of hands, a mass of them that formed a cloud of reaching fingers, all attached to an unseen body. It wasn't human, yet Will's chest still pounded with arousal. Will lifted his hips in invitation, wiggling as he tried to spread his legs.

Two hands started on his hips, trailing upwards, their fingers only ghosting on the skin, nails leaving tingling lines. They slid past Will's dripping cock, instead coming to rest wrapped around his ribs, thumbs laying heavy on his sternum. The hands weighed ten pounds each, lightly restricting Will's breath. The thumbs massaged circled into his flesh, then pressed inwards, splitting his skin and muscle like water.

Arousal turned to panic as Will's heart pounded, breath coming in short gasps. He thrashed, but the hands grip had become suffocating, immovable like iron.

Will's eyes slipped closed as the hands dove further, splitting him in two, reaching deeper into his chest than should be physically possible; its shoulder pressing into Will's chest as it searched. It moved with a slow grace, all while Will clawed at the arms he could reach.

It suddenly darted forward. The fingers inside him wrapped around something that turned the pain-pleasure-panic Will felt into a burning, all consuming flame.

Will woke up feeling damp.

Embarrassment left Will feeling like he'd missed a step and went tumbling down a flight of stairs as he realized he'd had a wet dream in two ways, as the bed sheets were soaked by both sweat and slick.

He couldn't leave the bed dirty, so he quickly stripped the sheets, wadding them up and praising God that he hadn't stained the mattress as well. Will scurried down the stairs, head swiveling as he tried to both avoid Doctor Lecter and remember where the laundry room was.

Unfortunately, the doctor had a magical ability to appear when Will least expected it.

“Thank you for stripping the sheets, allow me to take them,” Doctor Lecter grabbed the crumpled sheets, only for Will to pull them back.

“Please, allow *me*.

The doctor released the fabric, allowing Will to scurry to the washroom and toss the blankets into the machine.

As Will creeped back into the kitchen, he got an eyeful of the doctor’s broad back. Assuming the alpha wasn’t paying attention, Will paused for a second to appreciate the slight strain of fabric between his shoulders.

The alpha tossed an egg into the air, effortlessly angling his knife so the egg landed on it and cracked into a waiting bowl, “How do you take your eggs, dear Will?”

Will jolted, ears warming, “Sunny side-up.” The omega walked into the kitchen, arms lightly crossed, craning his neck to appreciate all the fancy cooking supplies the doctor had invested in. In any other case, Will would assume it was alpha posturing, an attempt to impress those who didn’t know better with esoteric tools and preformative technique, but Will could see the wear on each machine. Every tool was taken care of, polished and cleaned, years of use left slight indentations where the doctor’s hand rested in the wooden handles.

His hands wrapped around one of the knives, and lifted it, testing its heft, thinner fingers slotting into the slight grooves. Will could feel the phantom warmth of frequent use, imaging the slight resistance then lovely, buttery give of flesh under the blade. It reminded Will of his filet knife, a birthday gift from his father when he’d turned thirteen, that had held up against years of consistent use.

“Actually,” Will said, still admiring the mirror-like shine and slight scratches of the blade, “I’d like you to make the eggs however you like them.”

The doctor finally turned, looking at Will. He waited until Will shrugged, gesturing at the lines of expensive-looking pots with the tip of the knife, “I don’t think you started cooking just to show off. That’s for people who need to prove something, and you don’t. But, I’d be a fool not to notice that you find it rewarding to impress people with dishes they’ve never heard of before, ones they couldn’t even dream of recreating. So,” Will slotted the knife into its block, “impress me.”

Doctor Lecter stood stone-still, posed yet relaxed like an apex predator in its environment. He stepped forwards, looming over Will for a moment as he picked up the knife. Then, for the first time since Will met him, the doctor smiled, “Certainly, dear Will.”

The doctor cooked like a ballet dancer, dramatic, larger-than-life moves practiced to perfection. He glided through the kitchen, from fridge to sink to stove, seemingly without stopping. With Will’s permission, cooking became a true performance. The knife flew through a handful of fresh chives, effortlessly slicing them paper-thin. With one hand, he sprinkled the chives, salt, and black pepper into two buttered ramekins, tossing them with just enough flare for Will to notice.

“Why do you think I started cooking?”

Will watched the doctor place the ramekins in a water-filled skillet. He leaned his head on his hand, temporarily forgetting his good manners as he slipped into the doctor’s life. The man cooked for an audience when he had one, but it was less like a pony showing off its one trick, and more like a pre-existing skill that had been polished for the public. He didn’t cook for the novelty of it, he lacked the hobbyist zeal. There was a restricted coolness to how he cooked, the kind of confidence that only came from–

“Necessity,” Will said, “You started cooking because you needed to. I don’t think you learned young, but I do think you had to learn very quickly.”

The doctor pulled the lid off of the pan, releasing a cloud of steam that obscured his face for a moment, “I began cooking when I was seventeen. You are correct, that before then I had others to prepare my food. My home was taken from me, robbed of my parents and of the food from my mouth.”

Will felt other’s pain as real as if it was his own. His father only took him to one funeral, for his great uncle, a man Will had never met. Yet, a five year old Will had to be carried out, as he bawled, crying and screaming, collective grief so strong it became physical pain. As the doctor alluded to what must have been a great trauma, Will felt nothing. The doctor’s emotions were tight to his chest, leaving Will’s head empty enough he could think instead of feel. It was like walking out of a perfume parlor, filled with suffocating scents, into the fresh air. The alpha did not desire sympathy, nor needed comfort. He was telling Will because he wanted to.

“You became a hunter at the same time you became a chef. It’s one in the same, to you,” Will said. He didn’t offer an apology for pain he didn’t feel and that the doctor didn’t need.

The same genuine smile rested on the man’s face as inclined his head to agree. He topped off the eggs with a swirl of cream and the diced ham. The eggs were paired with a piece of sourdough toast and two cups of coffee, which the doctor dressed with a spoonful of sugar and no milk, precisely how Will liked it. Will immediately picked up the clear glass mug, and took a large sip. It made the drip-filter swill Will made at home taste like bitter water.

“Tell me about this dish,” the doctor said in a way that left Will feeling like a hunting dog, finally given a command, muscles burning with excitement as he launched himself into the underbrush to find his prey.

The fork slid through the eggs like butter. The yolk was like custard, richness balanced by herbs, all cut through with the saltiness of the pork. “It’s good, but that’s not what you’re asking, you know it's good. It’s simple, you used,” Will paused and tallied them, “four ingredients along with salt and pepper. You’re elevating basic staples, trying to really show off your skill.” He gestured to the eggs with his fork and took another bite, “It’s also French in origin, likely because you assume that I associate French cuisine with fancy-ness and class.” Will dunked his toast into the yolk, and went for the throat, “You tried to throw me off. This was a ploy to see if I’d play along like anyone else you cook for; because you wanted to see what I’d do, not because you wanted to eat them. They’re good, but I’m not impressed.”

The doctor could have been purring, “What would you have me do in order to impress you?”

“Make me your favorite eggs, next time.”

“Next time?”

Will paused, realizing how presumptuous he sounded, “I mean, if-”

“I would be pleased to make you breakfast again. Now, finish up and get ready, you’re coming with me to the office today.”

When they’d first stepped out of the doctor’s car, the man had put his hand on Will’s left shoulder. Will had first assumed it was to keep them both under the umbrella as sheets of rain fell. But, the alpha didn’t remove his hand when they entered the building. Instead, his hold tightened slightly, keeping Will close to him as they walked through the lobby and headed downstairs.

The conference room that had been transformed for the investigation was in the basement of the NOPD’s headquarters. It was cold, the ac blared as the walls sucked up any residual heat. The reflective tile floor leaked the chill through Will’s socks and shoes.

The lights hummed, casting a shine onto the rows of photos pinned to a corkboard that dominated the northernmost wall. A map of the country had a sprinkling of bright red pins, all clustered around cities on the Gulf coast.

There was another person already in the room, a short alpha woman with a high ponytail and a distinctly citrusy scent. She sniffed the air, slightly raising her chin, “This is restricted information, Doctor Lecter, you’re not allowed to bring civilians down here.”

“Good morning, Officer Zedekiah. Will is not a civilian, he’s an independent consultant.”

The woman turned around, her face pinched in disbelief, “Your *independent consultant*?”

The doctor’s hand tightened around Will’s shoulder. It grounded him, allowing the officer’s clear distaste to slide off of him. Doctor Lecter responded to Zedekiah, but Will turned them out, instead focusing on the corkboard of photos. The victims were omegas, all with long, brown, curly hair that brushed against their shoulders. They range in age, but tend to get older as time goes on. Will grabbed the first file. Cyrus Semel, sixteen years old, went missing from a summer college prep program in 1991. Will glanced over the photos, comparing them to their files.

“That one is the only body found, correct?” Will said, pointing at the twelfth photo, of twenty-two year old James Peter.

Doctor Lecter immediately ended his conversation with Officer Zedekiah to answer Will, “The first eleven were all cold cases.”

“We have no proof that these cases are connected,” Officer Zedekiah said.

Will had assumed that after they’d discovered the body someone had realized a statistically abnormal number of omegas with curly, brown hair had gone missing in the area. He started flipping through files, reading the case reports for the various disappearances, sorting the papers into two piles. Words seemed to blur between pages, picking up on every recurrence, every pattern.

“Only eight of these are from our killer,” Will announced, finger running along the edge of a glossy photo. “These four are unrelated.”

Officer Zedekiah crossed her arms, “How’d you figure that out?”

“They’re smiling.”

The officer’s eyebrow raised, “Doctor Lecter, I don’t–”

“These four are described as happy, as joyful by their friends and family. The kind of people who light up a room. These eight are lonely, isolated. They only have reports from immediate family. And if we remove them,” Will walked to the corkboard and plucked the four pins off, turning the random scattering into a clear line, chronological killings traveling from Key West to Corpus Christi, then ending in New Orleans. He turned around, allowing the map to speak for him.

Officer Zedekiah’s head tilted, her posture loosening, “Is there anything else you noticed?”

“I believe you should thank Will for his help, especially after you dismissed him,” Doctor Lecter said, bringing himself back into the fold. His hand found its home again on Will’s left shoulder, where he gave a light squeeze.

The officer scratched the back of her neck, “I suppose I do.” She turned to Will, “Your insight could be what we need to crack the case. I’d like to see you back here. Now, what do you think happened to the rest of the bodies?”

Pride radiated from Will’s chest, so strong he started to rhythmically clench and unclench his hands to keep from making a fool of himself. Will was off like a shot, discussing different aspects of the case until the doctor mentioned that it was getting rather late and led Will back to his car.

“Would you allow me to make you dinner tonight?” the doctor asked, as Will climbed into the alpha’s Bently.

Will glanced at the dashboard clock, quarter to eleven, “And let me fall asleep at your table again?”

The doctor was quiet, staring at Will for a beat too long, “Home it is.”

Will nodded, small smile still present on his face. He let his eyes rest for a moment, surrounded by residual joy and the doctor's calming scent.

After what felt like a few mere minutes, Doctor Lecter gently squeezed his shoulder, waking Will from his half-slumber.

Will hopped onto his boat, feeling the familiar rock of the deck under his feet. He headed to the cabin, taking a moment in the doorway to glance over his shoulder. The doctor was still standing near his car door. The streetlight he'd parked next to only half illuminated the man and his car, leaving his upper body silhouetted in darkness. Will gave the doctor a wave and saw the shadows pull at the man's form as he waved back.

As Will ducked inside, he noticed the lights were all off, only the low murmur of the news from the tv illuminated the living room.

"Where were you?" his dad asked, sitting on their leather recliner, back turned to Will.

"Dr. Lecter's. I left a note on the–"

"I saw the note. I also didn't see you back home this morning."

"I was-"

"I went to the doctor's house and found it empty," his dad's voice was like stone and the argument made Will feel like he was trying to climb a wall, fingertips scrambling against smooth tile. Shame flashed through Will, quickly replaced by a fiery indignity.

"I was perfectly fine!"

"I was worried you'd gotten killed. "

Will crossed his arms in front of his chest, "You're acting paranoid. I was out of your sight for a day."

"There's some killer walking around, who grabbed some omega off the street and slaughtered him!"

Will broke, his father's fear and love palpable as the man himself. He stepped into the light of the tv and wrapped his arms around his dad's torso. "'M sorry. I was with Doctor Lecter. He took me with him to the investigation a

Billy-Graham hugged Will, then leaned back in his recliner, pulling Will off his feet and deeper into the hold.

"I love you, dad."

Chapter End Notes

thanks for the comments you guys, theyve been a real delight to read!

September 6th, 1997

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Officer Zedekiah's question weighed on Will's mind in the coming weeks. It occupied most of Will's daily routine, while he worked on the boat from seven to noon, while he and the doctor shared lunch, and then while Will helped consult until it was time to head home. It ran in the back of his mind while he helped Abigail pack up her things and move into her dorm, going from a whisper to a shout as he and the doctor drove back, car one-third emptier. The question dominated their investigation and creeped upon Will in the quiet moments, late at night. It came in the form of eight omegas, standing at the edge of his bed. The low light obscured their faces and turned their blood black, wounds like little voids, blending them into the shadow. They mumbled in low tones, overlapping and breaking apart like waves. Will laid, pinned to his bed, heart racing, sweat mounting, fighting for every breath when he realized what the dead were saying.

Why?

Why them? Why were they snatched away? Why did they find one body when the others seemed to just disappear? Why them? Why did it have to happen to them?

It plagued Will as he loaded Doctor Lecter's boat onto a trailer, as he gave directions to Abigail. She was back in town for the long weekend, her first chance to visit home after the fall semester started, and she'd volunteered to join Will for a test drive. Will was thrilled just to have some company to get his mind off the investigation.

Will and his dad had taken the doctor's boat out a handful of times in the past week, making sure that it was functional and buoyant. Now that it was assuredly safe, Will was taking her out to check the rigging. They set out on Lake Pontchartrain, where the water was calm and the winds were blowing.

"Where do you want to go?" he called to Abigail, who was looking over a chart of the local lakes.

"What about here?" she offered, bringing the map over and pointing to an island to the North-East, "There's a nature reserve there, so it should be a great place to find bugs."

Will nodded, angling the boat towards their destination. Wind filled the mainsail, causing it to balloon outwards, nearly tearing the rope from Will's hands. His arms burned as he righted the boat, a satisfied grin filling his face. Light cloud cover gave them spotty patches of sunshine before covering them with shade.

They spent a leisurely forty minutes piddling around the lake. Abigail recapped her first weeks of school, telling Will about her annoying roommate and all of her classes. Meanwhile, Will circled the boat, looking for any signs of luffing or weakness from the pulleys.

Will pulled the sails inward, tied them off, and then moved to the motor. While the engine was completely new, an eighteen horsepower beauty that Will had been practically drooling over, the mount wasn't. The specific supports needed were on backorder, and wouldn't arrive for another week or so. While it wasn't likely to break, Will was too cautious to let the motor run without direct supervision. Using a light touch, he guided the craft into the empty public dock.

Once the boat was tied down, Will hopped onto the dock and extended a hand to help pull Abigail over. They walked towards the beach, shucking off their shoes at the back shore. Abigail's eyes were glued on the sand, already started on their trip's secondary agenda, filling out a local insect survey for her biology class. She crouched down, chewing on the eraser end of her pencil. A little black beetle skittered across the sand.

"What are they?" Will asked, watching the beetle scuttle towards a dead fish.

Abigail filled out a section of the chart, "A bug."

Will raised an eyebrow. She shrugged in response, "I just know they're not normally around here, because they're not on my chart. I've only been to three classes, we haven't covered every single beetle yet."

Will huffed in good humor, "That's in class four."

He grabbed a stick and flipped the fish over, sending beetles running. Something about the fish's corpse, toothpick ribs cleaned by tiny mouths and hundreds of scuttling legs, sent a cold jolt down his spine, like someone dragging a finger down his back.

"Gross," Abigail supplied, nose scrunched up, "How many were there?"

"At least thirty, maybe fifty?"

She dutifully wrote down Will's guesstimate. They continued down the beach, finding a few other beetle species, including one with an iridescent shell, several anthills, and an irritating amount of flies.

Will smacked a horsefly on his arm with a grimace, "Y'know there's a kind of fly that grows inside people?"

"What?"

"They're called botflies. They lay their eggs on people and then the larvae grow inside you. Then they crawl out," Will wiggled his fingers, demonstrating what the bugs did under skin.

"Gross," Abigail blanched. Will stood up, noticing another trail of black beetles crawling over the rocks.

"They're my favorite."

"Because they're gross?"

Will made a so-so gesture, “They’re the only bug that’s evolved to parasitize humans. Most of them just happen to eat us, but the botfly is specialized for it.”

Abigail rolled her eyes. If it was anyone else, Will would have taken it as rejection. He’d spent years being told by children and adults alike that he was off putting, that his morbid interests turned people away. But Abigail didn’t mind. She didn’t want to hear more, but she understood. Will listened to the day-to-day mundanities of her college life, and she listened to his uncomfortable bug facts, tit for tat.

Once Abigail’s assignment was filled out, they headed to the dock. They took an expedited trip back, as they both had other things to do that afternoon. They tied the boat down onto the public dock, and Abigail drove Will to the mall before heading home.

“Can you write down your phone number for me?” Will asked, as he unbuckled his seatbelt.

“Sure,” Abigail tore off a corner of her paper, “I’ll put my dad’s number too.”

Will nodded, stuffing the paper in his pocket as he hopped out of the car, right at the mall’s RadioShack. He gave Abigail a wave as she left. Will, after saving the spare cash he’d gotten over the summer, was looking to purchase something his dad always said was an unnecessary expense; a cell phone. They’d recently released an antenna-less model that came with a prepaid cell-plan earlier this year. Thirty-five dollars a month and Will would have three thousand minutes and two hundred texts. Will didn’t know who he’d call for three thousand minutes, nor who he’d text two hundred times, but he was excited to have it. The box was hefty in Will’s hands, but the product itself was well rated and would hold up to wear. He grabbed another, deciding that he’d get one for his dad as well.

Bag in hand, Will headed out. He almost headed home, then thought better of it. Instead, he headed into the mall. The rubber soles of his sneakers squeaked against the off-white linoleum floor, slightly louder than the consistent footfall of the other mall-goers. They bustled past Will, mothers and children doing last minute back-to-school shopping, teenagers killing time, and other groups. They poured around him like a rock in a stream. Will had never been able to match a regular walking speed. His gait was a half-step too slow naturally, and when he thought about it, he walked a half-step too fast, always either a few inches too close or too far from others.

Will made no attempt to match the flow, instead letting himself drift in the river, feet wandering wherever he was buffered. His mind slipped, experiencing a kaleidoscope of flash in the pan feelings, the thoughts of strangers occupying his head. It felt as though he stopped being himself for a moment, instead a conduit for those around him. It was both a relief, a temporary break from being himself, from performing humanity, and a terror, as Will always found it hard to come back to himself after drifting.

He realized that it had been weeks since he’d been surrounded by strangers. Most of his life was divided between home and Doctor Lecter’s, his social circle paired down to barely three. Will wondered if it should upset him more than it did, but he’d never had many friends, and while isolation had dogged him in his teen years, he felt as though he’d grown out of being lonely.

He stopped in front of a department store, one slightly more expensive than the one he normally looked for clothes at. His wallet felt heavy in his back pocket, filled with excess cash from Doctor Lecter. Will smiled to himself, wondering if the alpha had to drag a young Abigail through fluorescent-lit isles. He wondered how young Abigail was when she was adopted, how long the doctor had been a presence in her life.

Will couldn't remember the last time he'd gone shopping without an agenda and a strict budget. Normally, he'd attempt to be in and out as quickly as possible, picking up replacements for clothes and shoes he'd worn through. He passively flicked through the t-shirts, nose wrinkling as he caught the scent of multiple alphas. All at once, Will realized the entire section of the store smelled of alpha, as it presumably always had, although Will had previously been unable to tell.

The tips of Will's ears warmed, his fingers worrying a stray thread on the hem of his shirt as he walked away from the masculine section, heading towards the feminine clothes. Away from the slight social friction of an omega in the 'men's wear' section. He hadn't thought about buying clothes since he presented, and things were different now.

The feminine isles were more populated and well stocked. Instead of one rack of cargo shorts in a range of two to three colors, there was a seemingly infinite variety of cuts, colors, and styles.

Will held up a white tank top, with thin spaghetti straps and faux lace. It was completely different from the clothes that filled his closet, pretty over practical. Will wondered if he should wear something like the shirt, if he'd wake up one day with the desire to wear skirts and blouses. Will had never dressed for anything other than practicality, but now he was expected to perform. All the magazines he'd read said was now supposed to dress not only for himself, but for the alphas looking at him, and it left Will feeling queasy. He held it up to his chest, and felt foolish imagining what he'd look like. He could appreciate beauty in other omegas male or female, the softness of their features, the swell of breasts, but he couldn't look at himself with the same gaze.

A group of women, a mix of betas and omega, paused as he passed them. They looked at him oddly, before one of the omegas sniffed the air. They seemed to come to the same conclusion nigh simultaneously, returning to their shopping without a word. It was not an invitation or any shared camaraderie through designation, but it was tolerance. They wouldn't approach him, for friendship or conflict. Will's ears still tingled, slightly embarrassed that he was still an outsider here, that it was necessary for them to scent him before realizing he was an omega. Will wasn't even sure he wanted to be recognized as an omega, the sensation still oddly foreign, but he wanted to be recognized as *something*.

Will put the shirt back and stuffed his hands in his pockets. He wandered through the isles, stopping to look through the CDs and shoes, attempting to avoid other customers. He found his way to the off-season racks. Will's eyes were drawn to a pitch black coat with a simple, straight silhouette. It hung down to his ankles, and the collar would cover his neck. Will rubbed the sleeve between his forefinger and thumb, it was light but warm. It would serve him well, he could wear it open in brisk Fall weather, and, with an additional layer would be wearable throughout the winter.

Moreover, Will thought it looked nice. It was a little fancier than most things he purchased, a little more like something Doctor Lecter would pick.

He took it to the cash and paid, sliding the coat onto his shoulders as he left the store. Will felt a little warm, bundled up on a mild September evening, still satisfied with his prize. As he walked, the sky darkened, and rain began to fall.

Will entered his home, slightly drenched, to the sound of the TV blaring. His dad was cradling a beer while sitting on the couch, eagerly watching a baseball game. Without looking away, he passed a can of Pabst to his son as Will settled onto the other side of the couch, "You missed the start of the game."

Will rolled his eyes, popped the can open and took a sip, nose wrinkling at the aggressive bite of alcohol, and didn't respond to his dad. He remembered the pleasant sweetness and fruity taste of the wine Doctor Lecter served him, how it was balanced against the rich red meat. Will wondered if it was a bad sign that he preferred the floral wine.

"How are they doing?" Will asked, as the channel flipped to advertisements.

"Good. The Marlins are up five."

His dad had followed a handful of sport as they moved, always trying to support the local team. Until they'd landed in Florida, and a friend of his father's offered them baseball tickets. Will was only five, and remembers the game as a blur of lights and noise, less of the actual sportsmanship and more of the collective excitement of the crowd, being placed on his father's shoulders and cheering so loud his throat was sore for days.

Since then, his dad had been devoted to following the Florida Marlins.

Will stood up, "I'm going to make a sandwich, want one?"

Billy-Graham nodded, "We're out of ham."

"I'll pick some up tomorrow when I get the groceries," Will responded, jotting it down on the list stuck to their fridge, "PB&J&C tonight?"

"Sure. Toast mine."

Will nodded, despite that he was already out of view. He grabbed the white bread and tossed two slices into the toaster. Will placed his own untoasted bread onto a paper plate, slathering the right piece with smooth peanut butter and the left with grape jelly. The sandwich just didn't taste right if the peanut butter was on the left side. He slipped a clip off the top of a bag of potato chips, grabbing a handful and crushing them before sprinkling them onto the sandwich. With one hand, Will grabbed his own sandwich and took a large bite, while he used the other to assemble his dad's.

He walked back to the couch, handing his dad a paper plate while the beta grumbled under his breath, eyes locked on the game.

"Something happened?" Will asked, glancing at the scoreboard.

His dad gave Will an appreciative nod as he started dinner, “That runner is an ass. Scored, and now he’s showing off,” he took a sip of beer, using the can to gesture at the offending Doger’s player, “Just bad sportsmanship.”

A phantom fingertip trailed down Will’s back again.

“Showing off…” Will murmured, his mind miles away. Cold, dead hands, sixteen of them, grabbed at his back, clutching at his shirt, nails raking across skin as Will’s mind sparked. The web came into view as he connected the dots.

He saw himself in third person, walking alone through the mall, invisible to the rest of the crowd. But, instead of keeping his head down, he sees himself, or a version of himself, running into an alpha. The alpha was plain, a blank space in Will’s mind, but to someone used to being looked over, the alpha’s mere attention was addictive.

Will saw himself following the alpha out of sight, into darkness. No one spared a second glance at the pair. A new pair of hands, a new victim, grabbed onto Will’s throat.

The killer was an alpha, preying on omegas who would see his obsessive-consuming-possessive attention not as a red flag but as wish fulfillment. The game had become easy for the killer, what was once a thrill became banal. Something changed in the alpha’s life, and now he was killing for an audience.

“Willy?” his dad asked, bringing Will back to reality. The omega blinked, realizing his dad was standing in front of him, hand on Will’s shoulder. Will shook off the touch, skin still crawling with the dead. He grabbed the crumpled paper from his jeans pocket and punched Doctor Lecter’s number into his cell phone.

It rang twice, before the alpha picked up, “Hello, who is–”

“The killer wants us to find their bodies.”

“Will-”

“I know where the next one is.”

Chapter End Notes

its been a minute, hasnt it! i should be back to my weekly posting schedule after this chapter. this one was just a beast to write lol. its got a lot of set up for various plot-points in the future, and i needed to basically get a concrete skeleton for everything else before i could finish this one. (also in my planning ive realized that this thing is probably going to be longer then 30 chapters, but im not changing the count in hopes that i can cut it down lol)

anyway, thanks for all the comments, theyve really kept me going and are always a joy to read!

September 6th, 1997 II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rain fell in sheets, turning everything more than twenty feet away into a gray blur. It pounded on Will's back like fists, water seeping through his clothes. The sensation barely registered, merely background noise. Will was too taken with the connections, Officer Zedekiah's frantic energy and devotion to the case beating like a drum, guiding Will's feelings.

Doctor Lecter remained on the line with Will as he drove to them. He'd patched in Officer Zedekiah, and while his hunch wasn't enough to warrant rousing the entire force, it was enough to get the two of them interested. At the current hour, all the police boats were under lock. But, Doctor Lecter's sailboat, still parked at the Pontchartrain deck, wasn't.

Will bounded out the door, his dad trailing behind him. Within minutes, the doctor's car slid into view. Will jogged to it, finally ending the phone call. He opened the door, then felt his dad's hand grip his shoulder, "Where are you going at this hour?"

"My apologies, Mr. Graham, it is late. But, if Will has a possible lead on the case, it is vital we pursue it now. If you are concerned, please, join us."

"I could use a hand sailing the boat," Will offered.

The creases at the corner of his father's mouth deepend for a moment, then he nodded. They entered the car, Will in the passenger seat and his dad in the back.

"Officer Zedekiah will join us at the dock," the doctor said.

Once they arrived, Will and his dad took control of the craft like a well oiled machine. Will untied the boat as his dad switched on the engine. Without a word they bustled about, flowing around the doctor and officer. Officer Zedekiah was in civilian clothes, a t-shirt and sweatpants, her hair thrown up in a tight ponytail. She watched Will like a hawk, as if he might have a breakthrough at any moment.

"We're headed North-East, to an uninhabited island!" Will shouted, raising his voice to be heard over the rain.

Will guided them to the island he and Abigail had been at, then turned them westerly, following where the wind would have blown from earlier. The winds had been strong, powerful enough to pick up sticks, leaves, and even little bugs and blow them across the archipelago.

He squinted, hanging off the starboard side of the boat, ignoring his father's questions as to what the hell they were looking for. Will jumped off the side of the boat into the calf-deep

water. His vision doubled, seeing both the sailboat and a small dingey. His head whipped towards the shore, catching a glimpse of footprints that had been washed away weeks ago.

The thrum of rain drowned out his father's calls as Will let himself slip. His perspective kept tumbling, switching between that of a cooling body, carried with reverence by a killer he couldn't see, and himself, drenched and searching. He stumbled up the beach as the others reached land, breaking into a sprint. Feet barely touching the ground, he flew towards a large boulder, three times the size of those surrounding it.

"Here," Will shouted, pointing forward, "in here."

"What-" Will's dad panted, weighed down by layers of wet clothes.

Wordlessly, Doctor Lecter stepped past him, placed both hands on the boulder and began to push. It slid half an inch, easier than it should have been. Officer Zedekiah jumped in, and with their combined force, the rock shook, then rolled free, tumbling into the water. It left behind a yawning mouth, a dark cave. Officer Zedekiah clicked on her flashlight, sending hundreds of little black beetles scurrying away from the light.

The ninth victim glowed under the electric light.

The body had been torn into by something rabid. Glassy, dead eyes glinted, head lolled on his chest. Will clutched at his throat, strange, dangerous teeth, hundreds of them, latched onto his neck. He couldn't breathe, as half of his throat was ripped out.

He was choking, suffocating; his larynx a singular, pulsating wound. Will's knees collided with the sand as he emptied his stomach onto the beach. His fingers were buried in the ground; his knuckles were white as he tried to free himself from the killer. Bile spewed from his mouth; he was choking on his own blood. He was being devoured by a killer; he was surrounded by his dad, the doctor, and Officer Zedekiah. He was surrounded by a single, faceless figure who wanted to hurt him; he was surrounded by faceless figures who wanted to hurt him.

A hand touched his shoulder, sending him flying backwards. Fear, primal terror bubbled up his throat. His lips peeled back, hissing like nails on a chalkboard.

The silhouette stepped back, hands reflexively covering their ears. Will's back arched, shoulders hiking upwards to make himself appear larger, to protect his vulnerable neck.

Suddenly, something was draped over his shoulders, and he was surrounded by firm warmth. His limbs pinwheeled, kicking and hitting, his teeth sunk into nearby flesh. He hissed, volume raising to a screech, yet the figure did not falter.

He was pulled into a warm wall, brief touch turning into encircling restraints. Deep rumbling shook his skull, pulling him away from his body and into the space between. A large hand covered his face, palm pressing his nose down and fingers curling over his jaw. Will's mouth flew open, but the fingers kept him from biting. His breathing slowed, forced to take long breaths through his mouth.

Will whined as the hand left him, but his face was only exposed to the air for a second, as he was tucked into the junction between the doctor's shoulder and neck. The alpha smelled like safety, like comfort. He smelled like blood. The doctor tightly controlled his scent, covering his neck, until he'd undone his tie to tuck Will away. He was Will's entire world, everything he could see, feel, smell, and touch.

A moment of rationality cut through Will's instinctual stupor. He burned with embarrassment as he thought about what a fool he must have looked like to Officer Zedekiah and his father. He should pull away, separate himself. Instead, Will screwed his eyes shut, and burrowed himself into the safe scent of iron, too terrified to be embarrassed.

"I-I was," Will stuttered, thinking the cave mouth as he began to shake again. The doctor began to massage the nape of Will's neck, turning his body to lead, heavy and peaceful.

Doctor Lecter's speech was nearly drowned out by the rumble of his chest, "What did you see?"

"I was the body. He brought me whole and then," Will gestured to the corpse without looking at it. Will looked up at the doctor's face. He was curious, excited, and something else Will couldn't place. It was the same look he sometimes saw on Abigail's face.

"May I suggest an exercise for you?"

Will nodded, letting his eyes fall closed.

"Re-enter the scene," Will's shoulders tensed, muscles so tight they trembled, "and put yourself into the mind of the killer. Instead of violence being done to you, you will be in control. The visions will haunt you until you can clear yourself."

"I don't know how."

"Walk me through your vision."

Will swallowed the spit and bile in his mouth, "The killer brought me here."

"*You* brought the body here," the doctor corrected.

"I brought the body here," Will repeated, "The– I'd killed him less than an hour before, rigor mortis hadn't set in yet. I'd picked this area months ago, I was waiting for the perfect opportunity to bring a pig here.

"I found him outside a store, standing alone. It's better when they're male, they're harder to find, but it's so much sweeter. Easier to get them alone, too.

"I strangled him, I like to hold them while they die. I want him close, but I don't want to see his face. I need Him, not this pig but Him. He's so close and I can't have him but I need, I need-"

"Focus on the crime, dear Will. Do not lose yourself."

“I carry the pig to the cave. He’s in my arms like a bride. I’ve carried Him like that *before*. I place the body in its tomb, and begin my feast. I am ravenous. My work has taken me away from my favorite meat. It's worth it, He’s worth it. He will be a feast unparalleled. But for now, I settle for the pig in front of me.”

Will clenched and released his fist, “When I saw it the first time, when I was the body, I fought back.”

“An incongruity, as the victim would have been deceased,” Doctor Lecter said, as if he were discussing the weather, “Possibly indicative of a fissure between your own psyche and the victim's.” His hand rested heavy on the back of Will’s neck, heavy and grounding, “Please, continue.”

“I devour. My teeth ache. I place my mouth and tear, jerking my head back and forth. I take chunks. Decades of hunger, sated for a moment. I take mouthfuls. The meat of his throat gives easily under my teeth, like a peach,” Will ran his tongue over his teeth, the phantom sensation of skin breaking and blood gushing. “When I finish, I prop him up and seal him away, to be discovered later. He’s a claim, a proof of ownership.”

The doctor’s touch intensified, the kneading slowly pulling Will back to himself. His fingers tingled, his limbs were made of lead. The doctor began to prop Will up so he could stand. But Will’s fingers closed around the man’s shirt, unwilling to leave the sense of safety. Doctor Lecter hummed and, like a great cat uncurling, stood up, Will still in his arms. He carried Will with ease, using strength normally hidden under horrible plaid suits.

“Is he…” Officer Zedekiah trailed off, gesturing at the bundle of omega.

“He was merely overwhelmed by the scene,” Will screwed his eyes closed, pressing his ear to the doctor, feeling how his chest moved as he spoke.

“Understandable, I shouldn’t have brought an omega to an active scene.”

Doctor Lecter clicked his tongue, “Do not dismiss him. He merely needs a method to ground himself.”

“Insight into the crime?”

“Will was able to walk me through the killer’s methodology, connecting the evidence quicker than either of us could.”

“Such as?”

“We’ll find that the victim was asphyxiated and was transported and torn into post-mortem.”

Officer Zedekiah nodded, asking another probing question. The doctor responded, relaying what Will had said. He conveyed what Will meant perfectly, with his measured, accented voice. He spoke with surety, translating Will’s messy visions into clear statements. It allowed Will to sink, to retreat into the leaden warmth of the alpha’s hold. He’d done his part, and now the doctor was allowing him to rest.

Doctor Lecter continued to talk as they walked back to the boat. Officer Zedekiah had begun to rouse the rest of the force in clipped sentences, jumping between a conversation with the doctor and a rotating cast of others.

“I’ll stay here,” she said, “and wait for the rest of the homicide unit. With two bodies we may need to call in the FBI.”

The doctor nodded, stepping onto the sailboat dock, “If you need assistance, call me. But I am taking him home.”

“Of course. I’ll ask you to write up,” she gestured to Will, still the alpha’s raincoat sitting in his lap, “his insights, and I’ll be in contact.”

Will’s dad made it to the boat and started it up. He guided it into deeper water, using only the motor without the sail. He kept the doctor and his son in his eyeline.

“Dear Will,” the doctor asked, “would you tell me about the next repair you’ll be working on.”

Will opened his mouth, detailing how he planned to sand and reseal the deck. He slipped through the ride in a blur, his deep well of knowledge turning the conversation into a comfortable machine, whirring in circles as the doctor asked questions and Will explained until they reached Will’s home.

As Will stepped through the doorway, exhaustion hit him like a truck. The microwave clock read four thirty am, its green light illuminating the kitchen. Will shucked off the raincoat, chucking it onto a coat rack without looking.

“Willy, I want to talk about-”

Will cut his dad off, too tired for a discussion, one foot already into his room, “T’morrw.”

He shut the door without waiting for a response, and began to peel off his wet clothes. Fully nude, he wiped himself down with a towel, and tossed it into the pile. His breath rattled, when he closed his eyes he saw flashes of the crime scene, of a body half devoured.

Will crawled onto the bed and reached between the frame and the wall, pulling out an oversized flannel. He should have given it back to Doctor Lecter weeks ago. Instead, Will held it to his face, its nearly faded scent sharper after he got to experience the real thing. It smelled like blood; iron, copper, heavy and overwhelming to the senses. Yet, it smelled like comfort, like the doctor’s arms around him.

He shifted, rearranging his pillows. He placed one behind him, along the line of his back, and used the others to form a wall around him. He buried his face into the flannel and curled into a tight ball. The scent of blood and comfort lulling Will to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

new month new chapter! this one is a hair shorter then normal, but ce la vie. as always, thanks for all the lovely comments, they really mean the world

also. im probably going to have to move to updating once ever 2 weeks or every 1.5 weeks. college started up again and im busy as hell lol

September 7th-18th, 1997

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Teeth sliced through flesh, thin skin bursting under pressure like a peach. Addictive and sweet, blood gushed through his mouth, pouring down his throat. His chest soared, ecstasy and fulfillment. He was complete, two separate pieces becoming one, a unity denied to him in the past.

Will awoke to find his forearm in his mouth, warm blood seeping around his teeth.

Disinfectant, isopropyl alcohol, burned as he wiped his arm down. Bleeding turned sluggish as he wrapped it in bandages. Will looked out the bathroom window, the mid-day sun illuminating the whole room. He sighed, still tired but feeling too wired to attempt sleeping through the full day.

Will pulled on a pair of boxers and jeans. He paused as he leafed through his t-shirts, and grabbed the doctor's flannel. He buttoned it up, tucking it into his pants and rolling the cuffs to cover the fact that the shirt was several sizes too large. He stuffed his wallet into his back pocket, and headed out.

Almost an hour and a half later he returned, paper bag of donuts in hand. His dad was sitting on the deck of their house boat, coffee in hand. He was blinking sleep out of his eyes, still dogged by their late night.

Nervousness borrowed through Will's gut like worms, both his own and shared. Will used a crinkled napkin to hand a pastry to his dad. They sat in tense silence, powdered sugar sticking to fingertips.

"I think you should tell the doctor you can't help with the investigation anymore."

"What?" Will hated how his voice pitched upwards with hurt.

His dad massaged the bridge of his nose, "The victims look like you, Will. You're putting yourself in danger."

Will reflectively touched the back of his head, barely an inch long. He'd buzzed it every few months since he was thirteen, "Just because they're omegas with brown hair…"

"Hell, even if they didn't look like them, that omega was torn into by an animal. It's not good for you. It's too gruesome, too dangerous. *I* was disturbed seeing that, *you* had a meltdown."

"I'm fine now!"

"You hissed at me."

Shame bubbled in Will's gut, burning hot, "It was a reaction. Doctor Lecter calmed-"

“I don’t like that either. That doctor can’t keep his hands to himself.”

Will saw red. “Doctor Lecter was helping me! He’s the only reason I was able to come back to myself. He’s not–” Will closed his mouth with a snap, shoulders tight. “I don’t want to argue this with you.”

“He’s an alpha, I don’t want him taking advantage of you.”

“I bet you’re just mad I have someone else in my life, that I have something else going on,” Will declared, crumpling up the bag and dropping it onto the table. He stood up, turning away from his dad and climbing over the side of the boat, “It was always just me and you before, but I

“Willy I don’t-” his dad massaged his temples, “I’m looking out for you.” Will felt his father’s exhaustion like it was his own, stress and barley-masked frustration bubbling up. He mirrored it, matching it with his own anger.

Will snorted, rubber soles of his sneakers hitting the ground, “I’m an adult. I can look out for myself.”

Billy-Graham called out to his son, but Will ignored him. He stormed off, walking without direction or goal, but just to let off steam. Yet, instead of venting his anger, it only seemed to build. Will’s mind kept pulling him back to revisit every argument he’d had with his dad since he’d presented. It was day and night. His dad looked at him like he was delicate now, like he’d break under any pressure.

Before he’d realized it, Will was standing on Doctor Lecter’s doorstep. He sighed, arms crossed in front of his chest, hands busied by toying with the shirt cuff buttons. He had no reason to be at the doctor’s house on a Sunday morning. Will turned on his heel and resigned himself to head home and face his father, or possibly, to sit in the library for a few hours and then go home and face his father. Yet, as he stepped off the front stoop, he heard the door open.

“Hello, Will. Care to come in?”

Will felt the tension in his body snap, and then release. The doctor was dressed down, or atleast, his version of dressed down. He wore slacks and a button-up shirt, sleeves rolled at his elbows. An apron tied around his waist, exemplifying his wide shoulders and slight hips. Will’s ears pricked with warmth as he offered a token protest, “I don’t want to impose…”

“Nonsense, my house is always open for friends. I just returned home after driving Abigail back to college. Lunch is almost ready, and I am certain you could use a warm meal,” he headed into the foyer. When his back was too Will, he snapped his fingers, “Come.”

Before Will could process what the doctor said, his legs were already moving, carrying him to his spot next to the alpha.

“Sit,” Doctor Lecter pointed to the barstools, then pulled a sheet pan of roasted brussel sprouts out of the oven. He set the sprouts on a cutting board, then grabbed two bowls from

his counter. Will's eyes followed the man's ring finger, watching his hands flex and move. He chopped, grated, mixed, tossed, and, finally, presented. Doctor Lecter sat a wooden bowl infront of Will, "Tell me about this dish."

Will picked up a fork and stabbed through the mixed salad, "It's filling, but light. Hearty and full of nutrients. You included arugula, cherry tomatoes, and candied bacon. It's almost a fancy BLT in a bowl. All simple, approachable flavors that I'd be familiar with. You've acted it up, put on the full performance, but this isn't nearly as out there as you normally make, because you didn't make it for you," Will took a bite, it was delicious, as expected. "You made this meal for me."

"I was betting there was a chance you'd stop by."

"Are you a gambling man, Doctor Lecter?"

"Only when the reward is as valuable as your company."

Despite himself, Will smiled into his hand, "Why do you go through all the pomp and circumstance when you know I'll see through it?"

"For that very reason. I enjoy seeing your mind at work. Having my layers peeled back and exposed."

"You want to be seen."

"Who among us does not?" the doctor took a bite of his own meal, eyes falling closed for a moment, "Now, dear Will, what brought you to my door?"

Will sighed, pushing lettuce and candied walnuts around with his fork, "What if I came over because I thought you'd make me lunch?"

"An enticing possibility, but unlikely. If I had not caught you at my door, you would have left empty-handed."

"My dad and I had a fight," Will filled his mouth and chewed, formatting his thoughts, "He thinks I'm above my head with the investigation. He thinks it's," Will made air-quotes, "bad for me." He leaned his head on his hand, Will was sure the doctor would mirror his father's point, "I know he's probably right, but this is all I've ever wanted to do."

"I don't agree at all. While the scene was no doubt distressing, you provided valuable insight that proved to be correct when the body was examined by police. You merely need a method of grounding yourself, a rock to find security with."

Will looked away, staring daggers at the wall while avoiding Doctor Lecter's gaze. He could still feel the alpha's arms around him, the comforting pressure on the nape of his neck.

"Could you," Will stammered, "I mean, 'cause you're always at the crime scenes…"

Doctor Lecter watched Will, something intense in his eyes, almost like he enjoyed watching Will squirm.

“Couldyouhelpgroundmelikethatagain?”

“I would like nothing more, dear Will,” he leaned over the counter and used one hand to brush curls out of Will’s undoubtedly beat-red face.

The doctor took Will’s request in stride, taking up the position as Will’s unofficial minder. When Will slipped out of his father’s house before dawn, the doctor would leave his front door unlocked, and was always found preparing a warm breakfast in his kitchen. Will tried to ignore the wiggling something in his guts when he entered the alpha’s house without an invitation, as though he belonged there. When Will asked to stay at the police station for just one more hour multiple times a night, the doctor said nothing, only politely reminding Will it was time to go home when it neared midnight. He drove Will to and from, with seemingly infinite patience to adapt his schedule to Will’s whims.

Will found it easy to conform to a new routine, one based around avoiding his dad and his disapproving looks. As the weeks crept on, Will’s dad began to call, more and more often, attempting to reach out. The rare time Will answered, he found himself herranged, reminded that he should come home, and told that he wasn’t working for the cops and so he shouldn’t be spending all his time there.

Yet, no matter how frustrating it became, he couldn’t completely ignore his dad’s calls.

“Hello Will, am I coming through?”

“Hey dad,” Will said, “you sound fine, just like you did last time. It is just a phone.”

“It’s wireless, that has to change something,” Will rolled his eyes, and hoped that it could be heard through the line. “Anyways, I wanted to know where you were and when you’d be home so I can make dinner.”

“I’m at the station. I don't know when we’ll be done, so I’ll make myself something when I’m back.”

“Will, I thought we talked about this.”

“I thought you supported me.”

“Will,” his dad sighed, like Will was the one being unreasonable, “that was before.”

“Before I presented? You said it didn’t change anything.”

“You were crying, I wasn’t going to say–”

Will snapped his phone closed, cutting off the call. He shoved it into his pocket, turning around to face the board, “The killer is possessive. He feels like something he’s entitled to, something he owns has been taken from him. Or,” Will stood up, pacing across the room, “will be taken from him soon. I can’t tell if it's anxiety about the future or the past.”

“Why not?” Officer Zedekiah probed. She’d fluttered in and out throughout the days, bouncing ideas off of Will and the doctor, providing them updates as the autopsy report came

in.

“It’s messy, unclear. I can *feel* his need, his hunger, but everything past there becomes fuzzy.”

“What is he looking for?”

“I believe it to be not a what, but a who?” the doctor spoke up, “Our killer is searching for a person.”

“Yes,” Will said, “No. Yes, but no. Its a person, but the killer doesn’t see them as a person. They’re an object of worship, a toy, and a riddle. They’re a fixation for the killer. They’d be completely unassuming to us, outsiders, but to the killer, they’re special.”

“His golden ticket,” the doctor said, corners of his eyes crinkled. Will nodded in agreement.

“A spurned crush? Maybe the killer wanted a relationship they couldn’t have?” offered Zedekiah.

“No, it's more complicated than that. They know each other, deeply. The victims are placeholders. He believes he needs to completely consume his ‘golden ticket’. But either he already has, or he can’t for some reason.”

“Consider, it is not that he can’t, but that he won’t. Perhaps he knows that executing his desires would mean an end to his golden ticket.”

Officer Zedekiah clicked her tongue, “Whatever it is, he’s clearly escalating. We’ve gone from no bodies and disappearances scattered across multiple places and years, to two bodies in the same town.”

“And he’s been dressing the scenes. He’s wanted us to find these ones. What used to be a private mediation has become public, addressed to an audience. I don’t think he’ll stop, or even slow down, until he scratches that itch.”

Officer Zedekiah stood up, gathering a copy of the recent victim’s autopsy report, “We need more heads on this case if he’s planning on escalating further. I need all hands on deck.”

Will’s mouth creased, dreading the flood of officers. He’d only barely proved himself to officer Zedekiah, he couldn’t imagine the small conference room filled with aggressive alphas who’d look straight past him.

“May I make a request?” the doctor asked. When the officer nodded, he continued, “I believe it would be best to set up a secondary room if you want more manpower. I worry that it may be overwhelming, and obscure what could be useful clues.”

Will felt fondness bubble between his ribs, silently thanking the doctor for already knowing what he needed. Officer Zedekiah nodded, “I need this room, but I’ll get an office cleared out for you two. Keep me posted on any updates.”

Doctor Lecter turned and began to ask Will more probing questions, dutifully noting everything he said down. He said just enough to get Will going, until words were flying out

of the omega's mouth without thinking. Eventually, Officer Zedekiah returned and led them to a small office where they could be left alone. They worked for several more hours, until the doctor had to step out. Will began to revise the profile, writing down connections and crossing them out, losing himself in the investigation.

"Good morning, dear Will," the doctor said, gently waking Will by touching his shoulder, startling him awake from where he'd fallen asleep at the desk. Will blinked sleep out of his eyes, mind foggy. He glanced at the dark window.

"What time is it?"

"Almost eight pm, you've been asleep for the past three hours. You've been burning the candle at both ends, and it is time to go home and for you to get some rest in a real bed."

Will grumbled and buried his head into his arms, exhausting bringing immaturity to the top.

Doctor Lecter hummed, then pulled the wheeled chair away from the desk, starling Will. He bent down, placing one hand between Will's shoulders and the other behind his knees. Just as he began to stand up, Will's brain kicked in. He stood up, sputtering, gently pushing the doctor back, "You don't need to- I can walk on my own."

Doctor Lecter's head tilted to the side, eyebrows affectionately raised, a little like an owl watching a mouse it found cute.

"It's earlier than we normally head home," Will said, standing up and rubbing his tired eyes with the back of his hand.

"My apologies. I have a prior engagement tonight," he said, guiding Will out of the station, his palm still situated between Will's shoulder blades. Will hummed, then fell silent, letting the doctor elaborate on his own time.

The alpha unlocked his car and pulled open the passenger seat, "There is an opera tonight, a production of Antigone. I have taken a sizable absence from society as of late."

"Because of the case?" Will asked as he sat down, reflexively placing his hands at his side as Doctor Lecter buckled his seatbelt.

"Among other things," the doctor started the car, leading them out of the parking lot and onto the road, "Have you ever been to the opera?"

Will snorted, "Of course not, but I have read Antigone."

"What did you think?"

"I found it noble. She gave her life up willingly to bury her brother."

The doctor hummed, "I never have. While I appreciate the dramatics, Angtione's devotion to her moral code, I have little interest in self-sacrifice, and even less in suicide."

“She was doing right by her brother.”

“But not for herself.”

“That’s a little selfish, doctor.”

“Possibly, but I believe we are taught to fear selfishness. We are to live for others, to sacrifice endlessly. Antigone does right by her brother, but does she do right by herself?”

Will hummed, chewing on the doctor’s words, “I can’t imagine Antigone doing anything else. She would be so deeply changed as to be unrecognizable, a new person after being put through the crucible.”

“I find myself taken with that possibility. Survival and the sacrifices it requires interest me far more,” the doctor said as he shifted the car into park.

“Thanks for the ride,” Will said, stepping out of the car and idling for a moment, “Tell me how the opera is?”

“Of course. I would like to take you tonight, if you are amicable.”

Will shook his head, “Not tonight, I couldn’t impose.”

“Another day, then.”

“I’d like that, I think,” Will smiled, considering the discussion he could have with the doctor when a performance was fresh in their minds, instead of recalling a story he’d read years ago.

Will allowed the thought to carry him into his house. The living room lights were on, but the TV was off. His father was standing in the kitchen, hands wrapped around a glass of water instead of his usual post-work beer. Will made brief eye-contact with him, and then looked to the floor, feeling a surge of dread-exhaustion-inevitably as his dad’s emotions ran through him.

“Will, I need to talk to you.”

“What,” Will spat, frustrated.

The lines along his dad’s mouth deepened, “Tomorrow you’re going to tell that doctor he needs to find someone else to work on his boat.”

Will stared at him, silent. He’d been plunged, full body into an ice bath.

“We’re moving. I’ve found another boatyard in Florida that’s looking for hands. They said they’re willing to look the other way about you.”

“No,” cold disbelief turned to burning rage, “No, I’m not moving again. I’m not leaving the investigation. You can’t destroy my life, I’m not a child anymore!”

His dad sighed, still unable to look Will in the face, “I’ve been doing some reading, and, until you’re mated, I am your legal guardian. It’s my responsibility to do what’s right for you, even if you disagree with it.”

Will could hardly speak, disbelief and rage, hurt and fury. His dad reached out, placing a hand on Will’s upper arm and then pulled him into a hug. Instead of comforting, it was suffocating. Will’s fists clenched so hard they shook.

“It’ll be okay. We’ll move, and everything can go back to how it–”

Will cut his father off with a fist to the face. The man doubled over in pain, clutching his bleeding nose. Will bolted to the door, using one hand to shove it open and the other to pull his coat off the rack. He slammed the door behind him, and headed into the night.

Chapter End Notes

posting a day early bc im switching to an every-other-week update schedule. ill try to post weekly, but im busy as hell, so more likely then not itll b every other one.

also! thanks for the comments! >:) i love hearing u guys guess whats going to happen next

also also! thanks for 14k hits :D i love knowing yall enjoy reading this

September 18th, 1997 II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

By the time Will had ended up on Doctor Lecter's doorstep, his breath was ragged, harsh gasps. Tears blurred his vision, leaving his entire face burning. His fist knocked against the wood door before he could talk himself out of it.

After a terribly tense minute, the doctor opened the door, flooding Will with light. The doctor was dressed up, his normal eclectic patterns replaced by a deep, scarlet suit. He looked immaculate, cut from stone.

Will sniffled, rubbing his face dry with the cuff of his sleeve. He was a mess.

"I'm sorry, I forgot-"

"I'm glad you reconsidered and decided to join me for tonight's opera, dear Will."

Will blinked, the wind so thoroughly knocked out of his sails he forgot what he was planning to say. Taking his silence as agreement, Doctor Lecter placed his hand between Will's shoulder blades and led him inside. He peeled Will's coat off his back, fluidly draping it on a hook.

The doctor guided Will up the stairs, to the master bedroom, and into the on-suite bathroom. He crowded Will against the sink, then grabbed his hips, lifting him a few inches and sitting him on the counter. Will yelped, hands automatically grabbing the man's shoulders in surprise. He felt a warm puff of air on his neck as the doctor affectionately huffed.

Will reached up to wipe his eyes again, only for the doctor to grasp his wrist and gently pull it away. He replaced the sleeve of Will's shirt with a hand towel. Doctor Lecter's hand cradled his face, fingers resting on the little divot at the intersection of his jaw and ear. Will attempted to move his head away from the touch. The doctor's thumb moved, catching on the soft middle of Will's jugular. His grip tightened, bordering on painful where his fingertips dug into flesh. Will froze, air heavy in his lungs, then yielded. His muscles went slack, allowing the doctor to turn his head and continue to clean his face.

"While I am glad to have another opportunity to convince you to join me for the opera, I suspect you have another reason to appear on my doorstep."

Will sighed, "Do you interrogate all of your guests when they come over?"

"Other guests have clear motivations and patterns. I find you," the doctor passed Will a tissue to blow his nose, "delightfully unpredictable."

Will found himself smiling in spite of himself. He glanced up at the doctor, and saw nothing but honesty in his eyes. For a man who was always performing, the plain truth was rare, so

Will only found it right to return it, “My dad and I had another fight.” Will pulled his legs to his chest, feet at the edge of the counter, “Everything is different now. It’s like he completely changed after I presented. He doesn’t like me ‘getting involved’ with the investigation, and he’s got some paranoid delusion that you’re taking advantage of me.”

The doctor reached back and lightly squeezed the back of Will’s neck. The omega relaxed in his touch. “I would not want your father to think poorly of my intentions.”

“No,” Will snapped, “you didn’t do anything, that’s the problem! You’ve been so nice to me, and you’re not…” Will waved his hand, remembering the embarrassing dinner where he’d come onto the doctor and been kindly let down. “Anyway, he’s overreacting and threatening to make us move again.”

The doctor’s hand stilled, its weight felt like led, “That is a complete misuse of the ownership he has over you. As an omega’s guardian, his obligation is to use his control to support you until you have a suitable alpha.”

Ice sank in Will’s gut, “I don’t want anyone to have control over me at all.”

“With a proper alpha, control becomes a give and take. What you sacrifice is rewarded tenfold.”

“That’s easy for you to say.”

The doctor hummed, “Nonetheless, if we intend to make the opera, we will need to leave soon.”

Will looked down at himself theatrically, glancing between his worn jeans and t-shirt and the doctor’s suit.

“I have something for you to wear, follow me.” They headed upstairs, into the master bedroom. Doctor Lecter pulled a hanger from the back of his closet and passed it to Will.

As he left, the doctor hovered in the doorway for a moment, “Should you need any assistance, I will be glad to provide.”

Will snorted, “I should be fine, doctor.”

The suit was oil-slick black, the weave of the fabric turning red when it caught the light. He buttoned up his charcoal shirt and pulled up the slacks. It was a little large on him, loose in the shoulders, sleeve cuffs half an inch too long. He cinched the pants up with a belt.

It was well loved, and well kept. The suit had been custom tailored, but not for the doctor. Too small for the alpha, too tall for his daughter. Sized perfectly for a mate who isn’t there anymore.

Will held the tie, scarlet red and made of the same fabric as the doctor’s suit, when he realized he’d never tied a tie before. He turned the doorknob to see Doctor Lecter, standing outside. Will held up the tie, handing it to the alpha. He effortlessly wrapped it around Will’s neck, fingers flying and tying a knot that looked a little like a layered pinecone.

“The balthus knot. An eye turning, elegant tie.”

“Real proud of your *big*, fancy knot, huh?”

The doctor stared at Will, a single, blond eyebrow raised in judgment. He glanced at Will, and then his neck, “Now, forgive my impropriety, but I do not intend to throw you to the wolves,” the doctor paused to apply a thin layer of nude lipstick, just a shade darker than his natural skin tone, as was typical of alphas to wear. “The alphas of high society perform gentility, but I do not trust them to act appropriately if I were to bring a pretty, young, unbonded thing into their midst. I would like to mark you.”

Will felt dizzy. He nodded.

The alpha leaned in, heat radiating off his skin, mere millimeters above Will’s neck. He pressed his closed lips to Will’s jugular vein, the underside of his jaw.

Will’s heartbeat felt like a machine gun fire. The lipstick left a slight tackiness to his skin. As Will tentatively held his neck, skin still tingling, the doctor turned and picked up a hefty glass bottle filled with an amber liquid. He sprayed his neck and dabbed some on his wrists. With a wordless gesture, he instructed Will to lower his hand, and sprayed the omega as well.

“Scent neutralizer,“ the doctor answered Will’s unsaid question. “I won’t scent mark you in earnest, but I will give you the cover of my cologne.”

“Why do you cover your scent?”

The doctor gave Will a calculating look, “Why do you think I use a scent blocker?”

Will ran his hands along the thighs of his pants, looking down, “You care about controlling how you’re perceived, a lot. You preen and peacock all the time, having a loud scent leaves you too exposed. It’s too reactive to how you feel, it would break kayfabe.

“Also, you smell like blood. It puts people off, always has. Rejection is something you’ve been used to ever since you presented,” Will glanced up at the man’s face, the slight tightening of the skin under his eyes.

It was a testament to how tight the doctor’s mask was that Will couldn’t feel anything. He knew, first hand, how isolating and crushing the constant rejection could be. The doctor looked at Will with intensity, watching Will like he was flayed open, until he reached out and ruffled the omega’s hair, sending his poorly combed curls into disarray.

“Your insight is as awe inspiring as it is cutting. I believe we are past formalities, dear Will, please call me Hannibal.”

Will nodded, careful not to dislodge Hannibal’s hand from his hair.

In the mirror, they looked like a matching set, red and black fabrics blurred the lines where his silhouette ended and the doctor’s began.

“You are a vision,” Hannibal murmured. Will’s ears pricked with embarrassed-satisfaction, his head still buzzing with the complement. The doctor ran his hand along Will’s back, involuntarily causing him to stand up straighter.

“Still a little large,” he said, “but that allows you some growing room.”

Will felt the warmth of praise across the span of his shoulders as the doctor led them into his car. Yet, that excitement melted into a low hum of anxiety, his nerves building as they entered they got closer.

“I don’t know about this, what do I even talk about with them?”

“You should not speak to them at all. While I understand your typical oppositions, we will be taking on the role of a traditional alpha and omega pair for the night. All conversations will pass through me.”

Will’s eyes tightened, frustrations and indignation building in his chest. He didn’t like that the doctor sprung this on him. He clenched and released his fists, grounding himself through the biting pain of nails digging into palms. They were already in the car, at the venue. There was no way to back out now, and he didn’t even really want to make small talk with the elites of New Orleans. Will breathed in through his teeth, “Fine.”

Hannibal rewarded his response by petting Will from the crown of his head to the nape of his neck. As he kneaded the skin with agile fingers, Will found himself relaxing in spite of himself.

“What do you want from me?”

“Stand by my side and appreciate the art,” Hannibal said, stepping out of the car and opening Will’s door. He passed the keys to a valet and held his elbow out for Will to take. Will felt like a fish out of water, surrounded by clothes that cost more than a month of his typical salary. He’d grown up outside buildings like the Opera House, working for the people inside.

The doctor lead Will into the lavish lobby. The ceiling was domed, ivory colored the entire way. The building was filled with a lake of people, bubbling around them.

Will’s head was on a swivel, soaking up the lives and feelings of those around him. That woman’s shoes were killing her feet. That man was only there to make his paramore think he’s cultured. That employee thinks it’s bullshit that she doesn’t get paid extra tonight.

Will was startled back into himself by a stranger's voice, “Hello, Doctor Lecter, it’s been too long!”

A slick beta man, wearing a nondescript, black suit held his hand out. Hannibal unhooked his dominant arm from Will’s.

“Mr. Baudelaire, it is good to see you again. Unfortunately my work has overrun my social calendar as of late,” he shook the man’s hand, then wrapped his arm around Will’s waist, drawing him half a step closer.

“I understand that! My business just got several new investors and it’s got me busy,” Mr. Baudelaire looked over them, eyes keen and searching. Will grit his teeth, preparing for agonizingly slow seal talk. He hated it, but he could perform, and could act polite for Hannibal’s friends.

Yet, the beta’s eyes slid off him, spending as much time on Will as he did on Hannibal’s watch. He began to discuss the goings on with the doctor as they slowly headed towards the bar and ordered. Hannibal took the first glass and passed it to Will. As Will held it, he caught a slightly disappointed glance from Mr. Baudelaire, who flagged over the bartender to order.

“This is one of my favorite whiskeys. Try some.”

Will stared at the doctor, “I can’t…”

“No one will question an omega stealing a sip of their alpha’s drink.”

Will glanced around the room, taking note of the omegas hanging off the arms of their partners, holding glasses and passing them along when asked. Will took a mouthful of liquor, drinking most of the liquid in the glass.

“What do you think?”

“Your friend is lying about his financial situation,” Will said, gulping down the liquor, nose wrinkled with displeasure. “He made up stuff about new investors to try and sound better than he is, specifically because he knows you’re wealthy. He was hoping you’d buy him a drink, and when he had to buy his own, he chose a bottom-shelf whiskey. Before the end of the night, he’s going to make you an,” Will made finger quotes, “*incredibly generous offer* for a large share in his company. Don’t take it.”

Hannibal could have been purring, “I have no intention to; thank you for the warning. Now, what do you think of the whiskey?”

“Oh,” Will drained the last few drops, “Tastes like rubbing alcohol.”

Hannibal’s eyes sparkled with fondness, “Try just a sip, savor it.”

He plucked the empty glass from Will’s hands and held his to the omega’s lips, giving him just a taste. Will swished it in his mouth, feeling it’s cool burn, searching for anything past the acrid taste of alcohol.

“It’s woody,” he said, “tastes like smoke.”

“Good observation. The flavors only bloom with proper time and appreciation. Finish this, and tell me what else you taste,” he said as he handed Will the full glass.

The doctor lead them through choreographed conversations with a handful of acquaintances. He had the social grace of a swan, making it all look effortless. Will watched, observing the way the doctor’s performance created a mask, a false person.

Will sipped at his drink. When he emptied a glass, Hannibal would take it from his grasp and in a few minutes, it would be replaced by something else. It left him feeling floaty, loose in his body, like he was insulated from the world by a head of fuzz.

Although they spoke with several people, conversation never turned to Will. He was allowed to float, sipping his drink and listening as conversation passed over him. He was only mentioned in passing, a quip about how nice his suit looked, talking about him more like an accessory then a person. It should have rubbed Will the wrong way, but as he enjoyed another drink, something bubbly and fruity, he couldn't summon the anger. It was so much easier to stand around then to force conversation.

As the first act started, the doctor took them to a private box, occupied by a few people. Will's familiarity with the story allowed him to only pay the performance half-attention. The other half of his mind was turned towards the doctor.

Hannibal was a brick wall that radiated warmth. It seeped through his suit and made Will feel like a cat, basking in a patch of sun. He leaned back into the doctor's chest, tilting his head up against the man's shoulder. Will turned and burrowed his head in the intersection between Hannibal's arm and torso, attempting to press himself into another.

Hannibal's arm wrapped around Will's waist as he stood them both up. Will giggled and dragged his feet, feeling weightless in the other man's hold. He walked them through the lobby, and into a single bathroom, locking the door behind him.

The doctor sat him on a closed toilet lid. Suddenly, the floaty feeling was gone, replaced by a nauseating dizziness. The fluorescent lights of the bathroom made him feel ill.

"Why're we…" Will slurred.

"Dear Will, have you noticed that you are quite *excited*."

Will wished he could melt into the floor. He covered his face, keenly aware of the boner in his pants.

"There is nothing wrong," Hannibal wrapped one hand around both of Will's wrists and pulled them away, his other hand hovering half an inch above Will's crotch, "This is a completely natural reaction, but it would be irresponsible of me to leave you in this state around other alphas. I would like you to relieve yourself."

Will was beet red, overwhelmed and nauseated. He tried to find something to say, and failed.

"I do not believe in repression, but in endurance. Please, bring yourself to completion, and we will rejoin the crowd for the second act," Hannibal squeezed Will's wrists, then released him.

Will's hands clenched and unclenched rapidly, sweat gathering on his palms. His fingers shook as he pulled down the zipper. His cock strained against his boxers, a small wet patch soaking through the fabric. Will glanced up at the doctor, who remained statue-still, leaning

over the omega. Will's fingers flitted around the waistband of his underwear, unsure of what to do.

"Would it be helpful if I were to provide instruction?"

Will nodded, unable to lift his gaze from the floor.

"Pull out your penis and place the waistband under your testicles."

With shaking hands, Will did as he was told.

"Now form a fist around the head and pull it downward."

Will trembled like a stalling engine. When his fist was at the base, he extended a single finger to rub at the fabric over his slit. He whined, legs feeling weak. Hannibal's hand shot out, brutally grabbing Will's wrist, "Did I tell you to touch yourself there?"

Will could feel the beat of his heart in the base of his teeth, "No."

"I understand you did not have a typical omega's upbringing, but I will not allow you to debase yourself like that. It is never acceptable to pleasure yourself here," Hannibal said, tone firm as his hand hovered inches above Will's hole. "If you must masturbate,you should only use this," he continued, knuckles brushing over the head of Will's cock.

Will's core seized, his eyes screwing up as he came. His breath came out in sharp pants, his heart heavy in his chest with residual pleasure. Wordlessly, Hannibal gathered up a wad of toilet paper and began to wipe away Will's cum, first off his hands, and then off Will's dick. He held the omega's manhood clinically, clearing away semen and sweat alike, until he tucked Will away in his boxers.

"My apologies, dear Will, proper alpha would have you wear a cage."

Will didn't say anything, his muscles still felt like snapped rubber bands. He let the doctor dress him and walk them both to their seats. Will felt himself slipping, body and mind drifting, melting into his chair. When the doctor passed Will another drink, the omega leaned over, starving for contact. He slipped his arm into Hannibal's, resting his head on the alpha's shoulder.

Will barely played half attention to the rest of the opera. He found himself unable to focus on anything, cotton headedness taking over. Hannibal's hands found their way to Will's head, stroking his curls and massaging his neck, causing Will to turn even more to mush.

The world became a pleasant, buzzing blur. Will felt submerged, as though he was under a heavy blanket. During the second act, Will gave up even trying to follow the plot. Instead, he was drawn to Hannibal's warmth, and draped himself across their armrests to lean on the alpha.

Through the drunk haze, Will floated three feet behind his body, watching the performance as though through a TV. In most cases, shows and movies grated on Will's nerves, their emotions always too big, too loud, too able to eclipse his own. Yet, sitting in the dark next to

Hannibal, dressed in clothes that weren't his own, behind the lip of a glass, the performance was pleasantly unengaging. It was separate from him, the characters did not bleed into him. The opera ended, Creon mourning his cataclysmic loss. Will clapped when appropriate, staying slumped in his chair when Hannibal stood. He found it easy to lean on Hannibal, eyes heavy.

"Tired, little thing?"

Will nodded.

"I'll spare you the post-show socialization, as you did so well."

The area between Will's ribs turned soft. True to his word, Hannibal lead them out of the building, artfully parrying and disengaging any attempt at conversation. They'd gotten hallway down the stairs when a voice called out to them.

"Doctor Lecter," a voice called out, "Wait, I have a business-"

Will felt the low thrum of Hannibal's annoyance as if it was his own. He opened his mouth and yawned theatrically wide, turning his face into the doctor's chest.

"Forgive me," Hannibal said, "but it is too late to keep my young companion out. Do you have a business card?"

Mr. Baudelaire gladly handed over a cream card, instructing the doctor to call him.

As they left, Hannibal patted the crown of Will's head, "Good job, my little co-conspirator."

Will grinned into the other man's chest.

The valet brought around the doctor's car quickly, as most of the other attendees were still inside the opera hall. The doctor held open the passenger door for Will, "What did you think of the performance?"

Will found himself thinking through cotton. Yet, he chose his words selectively, unwilling to sacrifice a conversation with the doctor just because of his intoxication, "It was good. I liked the guy playing Haimon. Normally I gloss over him, but he really brought a lot of passion towards the end."

The doctor hummed, "I do agree, he has a lovely voice. While I have sympathy for Haimon, I have little respect for him."

"Because he killed himself?"

"Because he accepted that as the only course of action. Had he run faster, reached Antigone sooner, he could have kept her."

"But he couldn't have. He didn't know until it was too late."

"Ignorance is not a sin I forgive."

“A little egotistic, putting yourself in the role of God. What should he have done, be omnipotent, turn back time?”

“If he was truly devoted to his Antigone, he would have been able to do nothing else.”

“You dislike him not because he gave his life, but because he gave it ineffectually?”

“Precisely.”

Will nodded, leaning his flushed forehead against the cool window as he chewed on Hannibal’s words. Will’s eyelids were made of lead, the comfortable movement of the car lulling him into sleep.

Hannibal hadn’t intended for Will to drink himself to unconsciousness, but the little thing was so trusting, so willing to accept anything handed to him. In all aspects of life, Hannibal was a hedonist, only ever denying himself when it would lead to greater pleasure later on. The drunken flush of Will’s face was easy to indulge in.

Will was smushed up against the passenger side window, bright red imprint of the seatbelt across his cheek. Hannibal unlocked the door and lifted Will into his arms. The bird-boned omega was always smaller than Hannibal expected, wiry and boney where he expected supple firmness. It would take several years of dedicated care, building of personhood and of a more consistent diet, but Will would fill out the suit quite lovely.

Hannibal brought Will into the master bedroom, mentally rewarding himself for rejecting the temporary pleasures of buying a larger house for the much more meaningful pleasure of tucking Will into his bed. He considered, for a moment, joining him, crawling under the covers and wrapping himself around Will’s twiggy body.

Instead, he reminded himself of the promise of future pleasure, of laying beside Will every night, and left to sleep elsewhere.

Chapter End Notes

i promise were gonna get to see that cock cage at some point. i fucking. i promise. its coming. will sure wont be tho

End Notes

title is from mark on you by the mountain goats

thanks to everyone for all the lovely comments and support! i know its been a while, but after re-writing and re-planning most of the fic, i think its really going to be something good.

i deleted the first two chapters I wrote last year. ill be using chunks of that work in this fic, but if anyone wants a copy of the old fic, just ask for it and i can give you a pdf

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!